

**THE LIFE AND LITERARY LEGACY OF JÓN
HALLDÓRSSON, BISHOP OF SKÁLHOLT :
A PROFILE OF A PREACHER IN FOURTEENTH-
CENTURY ICELAND**

Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
University of St Andrews



1997

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of Medieval History in the University of St Andrews in
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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into the life and literary legacy of Jón Halldórsson, a Norwegian Dominican who was bishop of Skálholt in Iceland between 1322 and 1339. Little is known about Jón before his consecration, apart from the facts that he entered the priory of the Friars Preachers in Bergen early in his youth, that he studied for a considerable time in Paris and Bologna, and that after his return he became a canon at the cathedral of Bergen.

Because of Jón's remarkable role in medieval Icelandic literature this aspect of his life receives greatest attention in this study, especially his celebrated use of *exempla* or sermon tales. The central source pertaining to this activity of the Preacher is a piece in Old Icelandic known as *Jóns þáttr*. This anonymous work is studied in some detail, a theory is presented about its authorship, and finally, its portrayal of Jón is compared with his personage as it appears in other sources.

I, Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 40,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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I was admitted as a research student in September 1994 and as a candidate for the degree of MPhil in September 1996; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1995 and 1996.

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I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of MPhil in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

date 12.10.96.....signature of supervisor.....

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Chapter one

The life and memory of Jón Halldórsson, bishop of Skálholt

Jón Halldórsson was a unique figure in fourteenth-century Iceland. A feature that set him apart from the outset was his membership in a religious order alien to the North Atlantic island. Although the Friars Preachers, that is to say the Dominicans, were at the time a common sight in towns abroad, they never established themselves in this remote country under the Norwegian crown. As a matter of fact, none of the mendicants, not even the ubiquitous Franciscans, ever did. The relatively poor population of around fifty thousand people scattered about the vast countryside of medieval Iceland could sustain very few and small religious houses, and least of all communities in which corporate as well as individual poverty was practised, the ascetic prescription that made friars dependent on frequent acts of charity. Though there was a small number of secluded monks and nuns who lived there under the Benedictine or Augustinian rule in endowed foundations,¹ Iceland must surely have been perceived as a most forbidding and inappropriate place for friars. Itinerant mendicancy was, after all, a thirteenth-century adaptation of the monastic ideal that had evolved in response to the commercial and urban society emerging on the continent—a mode of life that never came about in medieval Iceland. And so, although St Dominic's was a

¹For information about monasteries in Iceland see M. M. Lárusson: "Kloster: Island." *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (henceforth abbr. as *KLNM*), vol. 8 (Copenhagen, 1963), cols. 544-546.

highly mobile and flexible order, an organization over a century old and just past its peak of development when Jón arrived in Iceland, the Preachers remained where they could best pursue their ministry out in the world, preaching in the urban environment across the ocean.

Indeed, it was not by reason of his international order that Jón, a Dominican from Bergen, came to Iceland in the autumn of 1323.² He did so as a churchman, for he arrived there as the newly consecrated bishop of Skálholt, a diocese within the Norwegian church province and covering three-fourths of the country; the second see, Hólar, had jurisdiction in the northern quarter.

It may be well to bear in mind the unusual circumstances of Jón's presence in Iceland. Obviously, he distinguished himself as a friar on the island. But this distinctive feature was of course accentuated by his high ecclesiastical office and it was even more notable due to the fact that he was the first mendicant to fill this office in Iceland. In Iceland, Jón was therefore noteworthy in two respects that together brought into strong relief his singular figure. Not only was he a Preacher far removed from the urban life and its audiences, all of his order's priories and his confreres, but also a bishop quite different from anyone before him in the Icelandic Church. Jón was in other words unique not in spite of his order and his episcopacy, two religious roles that would elsewhere tend to submerge the individual with all his departures from the attendant typologies—on the contrary, he was so because he was at once a Friar Preacher and a bishop in medieval Iceland.

²The main dates of Jón's life and their sources are listed by O. Kolsrud on pp. 264-265 in his guide to medieval documents concerning Norwegian bishops: *Den norske Kirkes Erkebiskoper og Biskoper indtil Reformationen* (= *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, vol. 17 B, Oslo, 1913).

But this is just the bold profile. The name of this 'displaced' Dominican is bound up with complex questions of identity, an intricate ensemble that cannot be overlooked in any appraisal of Jón's personage. Nevertheless, even the more perplexing features may be said to derive ultimately from his background as a Preacher, for this is not simply reflected in his seventeen years of episcopal administration. It appears to have had a profound effect on how the bishop envisaged himself and his world, how he was regarded during his lifetime, and after that, in what manner he was to be remembered in medieval Iceland. Farther removed still, looking back on Jón today, one may conveniently see his black and white habit as the prime reason for his historical significance, for Jón's peculiar place in Iceland's past.

The life of Jón Halldórsson has received no special study apart from Hugo Gering's survey in 1883,³ and this is in keeping with the general state of scholarship concerning Iceland in the Middle Ages. Without going into the subject of how a curious mixture of modern ideologies and attitudes has affected present perceptions of Iceland's past,⁴ it should be noted here how historians have emphatically concentrated their efforts on the time before the country came under the Norwegian crown in 1262-1264, the age when the nation inevitably appears to have had a more dignified place within medieval

³See pp. v-xxiii in the second vol. of his *Islandsk æventyri: Isländische legenden, novellen und märchen* (Halle, 1883). This study cites the meagre literature mentioning Jón up to the date its publication. See also F. Paasche: "Jon Halldorsson." *Norsk biografisk Leksikon*, vol. 7 (Oslo, 1936), pp. 101-102.

⁴I refer here mainly to the combined effect of nationalism, Lutheran attitudes and socialism in the creation of a distinct image of Iceland's Golden Age, the pervading influence of which has relatively recently been recognized as of interest as a historical subject in itself.

Europe. This is the period in which Iceland belonged to no king, when the population was either pagan or had a Church controlled by the native chieftains for almost three centuries after the millennium, and that witnessed at last the creation of Iceland's celebrated secular literature, sagas about kings and Icelanders.

The appeal of Iceland during the so-called Free state should therefore serve to explain why there has never appeared a single original and comprehensive historical work concerning fourteenth-century Iceland. And this has of course hardly been an encouraging context in which to study in any depth a figure of that century like Jón Halldórsson. Due to his origins and office it has indeed been difficult to abstain from seeing him simply as insidiously aligned with foreign dominance, the forces held responsible for the nation's independence and the decay of its indigenous culture.⁵

This line of thought adds little to Gering's account of Jón Halldórsson. His contribution appears in fact never to have come to the notice of Icelandic historians although it is still the most thorough study of Jón and the seventeen years of his episcopacy.⁶ Apart from their relative neglect of Jón's era, this is perhaps due to a superficial divide between disciplines. Jón and his century has certainly attracted

⁵This view of Jón is perhaps most clearly seen in what may be taken as the epitome of the modern Icelandic's perception of his country in the high and late Middle Ages, Björn Þorsteinsson's *Íslenska skattlandið*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 1956), pp. 145-149, 151, 154 and 157-158. See also B. Þorsteinsson and B. Jónsson: *Íslands saga til okkar daga* (Reykjavík, 1991), pp. 139-140. J. Helgason's account of Jón will perhaps be read with more profit: *Íslands kirke fra dens grundlæggelse til reformationen* (Copenhagen, 1925), pp. 185-187.

⁶Along with the works cited above, see the account of Jón's episcopate in M. Stefánsson's "Frá goðakirkju til biskupskirkju." *Saga Íslands*, vol. 3 (Reykjavík, 1978), ed. S. Línal, pp. 240, 244-246, 250 and the accompanying bibliography. The works cited so far should cover the instances where Jón is discussed in the main historical overviews touching upon 14th-century Iceland.

greater attention within the more advanced discipline of Old Norse philology, or textual, linguistic and literary scholarship, and ignorance in this area is of course a shortcoming in historical studies of the period.

The philologist's interest in Jón Halldórsson arises from the bishop's ties with Icelandic literature. Indeed, if we leave aside Brandr Jónsson's (bishop of Hólar in 1263-1264) *Gyðinga saga* and *Alexanders saga*, and the importance of several other bishops as subjects in the native Bishops' sagas, then Jón's literary influence arguably exceeded that of any other man who held this office in medieval Iceland. This should come as no surprise to those familiar with the literary output of medieval Preachers, especially when they bear in mind that Jón was primarily recognized in this respect for his sermon tales or *exempla*. Gering's comprehensive edition of such stories in Old Norse contains a corpus attributed to Jón, and this is why he saw fit to write a special account of Jón's life published in an accompanying volume, which also features a little *Quellenforschung* with the assistance of Reinhold Köhler, and loose translations into German.⁷ At the time, this edition excited considerable interest which led to further observations about the Icelandic collections of *exempla*,⁸ although study of those specifically connected to Jón has not been resumed since.⁹

⁷Gering and Köhler could in this respect use G. Cederschiöld's paper "Über eine alte sammlung isländischer æventýri." *Germania* 25 (1880), pp. 129-142.

⁸See the bibliography by H. Löschhorn in *Jahresbericht über die Erscheinungen auf dem Gebiete der Germanischen Philologie* 5 (1884 (for 1883)), p. 120, vol. 6 (1885 (for 1884)), p. 159 and vol. 7 (1886 (for 1885)), p. 166.

⁹The research of A. Jakobsen, to be discussed later, does however touch upon Jón's *exempla*. Cf. idem.: "Ævintýri." *KLNM*, vol. 20 (Copenhagen, 1976), cols. 614-616.

More surprising than our Preacher's use of *exempla* are his debated connections to the secular genre called *Riddarasögur*, or chivalric romance written in Old Norse. It appears from a prefatory remark found in one group of manuscripts of the so-called *Clarus saga* (the oldest of this group being Holm. 6 4to, from around 1400), which was once quite popular in Iceland, that Jón retold this foreign story in Iceland:

We shall now begin this story which was told by [*sem sagði*] the venerable Lord Jón Halldórsson bishop, of good memory, who found it in France written in Latin, in the form they [i.e. the French] call *rithmos* but we *hendingar* [i.e. rhymes].¹⁰

No source has ever been traced, but the story-line does have a slightly older German parallel and numerous younger relatives among the folktales of Europe.¹¹

Especially intriguing are the romance's affinities with a more ancient narrative, namely that of Skírnir's journey to the radiant Gerðr to ask for her hand on behalf of Freyr, a Norse myth related in *Skírnismál* and *Snorra Edda*. Interestingly enough, when Snorri Sturluson wrote his *Edda* in the first half of the thirteenth century, his perception of this myth was apparently influenced by the recent and

¹⁰Trans. from *Clarus saga: Clari fabella, islandice et latine* (Lund, 1879), ed. by G. Cederschiöld (also with lat. trans. by S. J. Cavallin), p. 1¹⁻⁸.

¹¹Its basic form, in poetry and prose, is that of the widespread *Märchen* referred to as *King Thrushbeard*, that is to say, Type 900 in the folktale catalogue of A. Aarne and S. Thompson: *The Types of the Folktale: Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* (=Folklore Fellows Communications, vol. 184, Helsinki, 1961). According to E. Philipsson's monograph (vol. 50 in the same series), its first variant appears around 1260 in the romance *Diu halbe bir*, attributed to Konrad von Würzburg: *Der Märchentypus von König Drosselbart* (Helsinki, 1923), pp. 3-4. The second variant is *Clarus saga*, the third, from 1556, is attributed to Luigi Alamanni, and the fourth, from about 1635, is found in Giambattista Basile's *Pentamerone*.

foreign traditions relating to romance and courtly love.¹² A notable feature of resemblance between *Clarus saga* and the myth is how the Arabian *magister* Perus overshadows the very suitor he is assisting, his pupil Prince Clarus. Instead of remaining in the more humble background as the hero's companion, Master Perus assumes the feats one would rather expect the nominal hero of the tale to perform. Like Skírnir, it is Perus and not the suitor who with his magical art tames the shrewish and haughty Princess Serena, whose name is reminiscent of Gerðr's radiance. Although Clarus' name has bright connotations as well, these cannot be taken as wholly laudatory. Its similarity to the Latin *clarus* and Old Icelandic *klár*, nouns that could in both languages mean egg-white, is possibly played on in the episode where Clarus is for the first time humiliated and rejected by Serena. He reaches for a soft-boiled egg courteously offered to him by the princess at her sumptuous banquet and, instead of sucking it like she, he clumsily smears it all over his fine clothes. 'Eskilvarðr', the name Perus gives to the prince after this spectacle, when he disguises him as a different suitor (an Ethiopian prince) and rubs dark powder into his face, has doubtless some connection to the traditional names of young and crazy scapegraces or simpletons, like 'Askeladden' in Norway and 'Kolbítur' in Iceland, humiliating names that (like 'Cinderella') are associated with coal or ash. This possible play on the prince's names and the terrible humiliations he suffers from the vicious princess he is madly in love with make one wonder if the name of the romance,

¹²Cf. P. Bibire: "From *Riddarasaga* to *Lygisaga*: The Norse Response to Romance." *Les sagas de chevaliers (Riddarasögur)* (=Actes de la Ve Conférence Internationale sur les Sagas, Toulon, 1982), ed. R. Boyer, p. 58. The curious resemblance between *Clarus saga* and the Norse myth has apparently never been discussed.

which is taken from that of the prince, does not highlight its contemptuous meaning as is the case in the other variants of the story (*King Thrushbeard*, *König Drosselbart* etc.), serving as a sort of comic implementation, if not ironic inversion, of the custom of naming tales after their 'hero'.¹³

Clarus saga has appeared in two scholarly editions. Both are the work of Gustav Cederschiöld, who wrote an introductory study to each and conjectured that Jón translated the Latin *rythmus* while he was a young student in Paris.¹⁴ Alfred Jakobsen has in a monograph dealt with its highly Latinate style to ascertain whether it accords with the prefatory statement about its original language and Norwegian translator.¹⁵ His observations can only support the attribution—which is, after all, stated in the source itself (the beginning of the saga is however missing in the only manuscript older than Holm. 6 4to). But not all have wished to believe the scribe's words and considered them instead, as Jan de Vries put it, a "reine Erfindung".¹⁶ To encourage such doubts there can of course be pointed out many examples of the mendacious use of eminent names to give literary material authority and prestige.¹⁷ But these reservations may also partly arise in view of

¹³This custom is well known in the literature of the medieval theatre. Hrotsvitha's *Dulcitius* deals for example with a wicked Roman governor by that name who becomes captivated by the three virgins (the real heroines and future martyrs) he has locked in his prison. It is noteworthy that he is described as a sooty "Ethiopian" when he is seized by mad love for the three virgins who sing hymns whilst he softly kisses and caresses some pots and kettles he believes to be them. See the trans. by M. M. Butler of this play in *Medieval and Tudor Drama* (New York, 1973), ed. J. Gassner, pp. 3-11.

¹⁴See the ed. quoted from above and *Clárisaga* (= *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek*, vol. 12, Halle, 1907). For Cederschiöld's ideas about its authorship, see pp. xxvii-xxix.

¹⁵*Studier i Clarus saga: Til spørsmålet om sagaens norske proveniens* (= *Årbok for Universitetet i Bergen, Humanistisk Serie*, 1963, no. 2, Bergen and Oslo, 1964).

¹⁶*Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 2 (2nd. ed.; Berlin, 1967), p. 535.

¹⁷Cf. S. Tómasson: "Hvernær var Tristráms sögu snúið?" *Gripla*, vol. 2 (1977), pp. 63-65 and F. Amory: "Things Greek and the *Riddarasögur*." *Speculum* 59 (1984),

the saga's very worldly and unreserved character, which some might consider at variance with the severe image of a Dominican bishop. This issue will be resumed later on.¹⁸

This brief discussion of Jón's relation to Icelandic literature leads finally to the so-called *Jóns þáttur*, an anonymous little piece in Old Icelandic from around the middle of the fourteenth century.¹⁹ It is the only medieval work devoted to the bishop's memory, and it is central to our study of him. Gering's edition remains the most reliable,²⁰ and even his small note on possible sources and parallels to three tales given in the *þáttur* has yet to be improved. Apart from his loose rendering into German,²¹ the piece has been translated into Danish

pp. 515-516.

¹⁸For a further bibliography on the saga (popular eds., translations (none in Eng.), studies, and reviews), see M. E. Kalinke and P. M. Mitchell: *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Romances* (= *Islandica*, vol. 44, Ithaca, New York and London, 1985), pp. 72-74 and R. Cook: "Klári (Clári) saga." *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (henceforth abbr. *MSE*, New York, 1993), ed. P. Pulsiano, pp. 356-357. Kalinke's *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland* (= *Islandica*, vol. 46, Ithaca, New York, 1990) is informative with regard to the general theme of the saga and its possible influence on other Icelandic works.

¹⁹Cf. A. Jakobsen: "Jóns þáttur biskups Halldórssonar." *MSE*, p. 346. There are two theories concerning the authorship of *Jóns þáttur*, one by P. Hallberg, who wished to credit Bergr Sökkason with the piece, and the other by Stefán Karlsson, who considers Arngrímr Brandsson a much more likely author. See P. Hallberg: *Stiltsignalelement och författarskap i norrön sagaliteratur: Synpunkter och exempel* (= *Nordistica Gothoburgensia*, vol. 3, Gothenburg, 1968), pp. 179-187 and S. Karlsson: "Icelandic Lives of Thomas à Becket: Questions of Authorship." *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference 1971* (London, 1973), pp. 235-238. These ideas will be discussed in chapter four.

²⁰*Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, pp. 84-94. The *þáttur* had its *editio princeps* in *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1878), ed. G. Vigfússon, pp. 221-230. There never appeared an introduction to the texts in this second vol. The next ed. of the *þáttur* was Gering's, and it has since appeared in two popular eds. The first is E. Ó. Sveinsson's *Leit eg suðr til landa: Ævintýri og helgisögur frá miðöldum* (Reykjavík, 1944), pp. 3-12. The second is to be found in G. Jónsson's *Byskupa sögur* (Akureyri, 1948), vol. 1, pp. 483-496. The former is an anthology of medieval tales and the latter an ed. of Bishops' sagas from the Middle Ages. *Jóns þáttur* is briefly mentioned in the introductions to these two eds., and also in comments at the back of E. Ó. Sveinsson's book.

²¹For the Ger. trans. and note on sources and parallels, see *Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 2, pp. 70-77.

and partly into Swedish,²² but the following pages contain an almost complete English translation.

Besides being an attractive piece of literature, *Jóns þáttr* offers an invaluable portrait of Jón Halldórsson and his times. Memory of him as a Preacher in Iceland stands out most clearly in this work, doing so from the very outset:

Mention shall now be made of a venerable man named Lord Jón Halldórsson, the thirteenth bishop *Skalholtensis* in Iceland. He was a most praiseworthy man of his station [*í sinni stætt*] as will long be remembered in northern lands. He spent his life [*ævi*] for the most part as follows. When he had become a Preacher [*prædikari*] in the kingdom of Norway, he went to *studium*, going very young all the way to Paris, and at last to *Bononiam*. He returned from *scolis* at a perfect age [*fullkominn æt allri*] and was thus the wisest clerk that has come to Norway, and he was therefore consecrated and elected bishop *Skalholtensis* by Archbishop Eilífr.²³

This eulogy is not, as many readers might expect, preserved with the Icelandic Bishops' sagas, a native genre that had a sort of renaissance in the fourteenth century.²⁴ The unknown author commemorated the bishop in the first place as a *prædikari*, and placed the piece with material related to preaching, namely a number of *exempla* in Old Icelandic he was compiling.²⁵ After the prefatory passage quoted

²²See H. Bekker-Nielsen: *Historien om biskop Jón til Skálholt: Portræt af en middelalderbisp paa Island* (Skjern, 1964). The trans. is on pp. 21-38. The introduction and epilogue are of the most general sort and mainly aimed at informing the Danish readers about ON literature. G. Cederschiöld's Swedish trans. of two anecdotes in the *þáttr* is to be found in his *Medeltidsberättelser: sagor, legender ock anekdoter från fornländskan* (= *De svenska landsmålen ock svenskt folkliv*, vol. 5, pt. 6, Stockholm, 1885-1891), pp. 95-98.

²³Trans. from *Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 841-9.

²⁴For information about this genre and mention of *Jóns þáttr* with respect to it see M. M. Lárússon: "Biskupa sögur." *KLNM*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1956), cols. 630-631; P. Foote: "Bishopssaga" *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. 3 (2nd ed.; Berlin and New York, 1978), pp. 40-43 and Á. Egilsdóttir: "Bishops' sagas." *MSE*, pp. 45-46.

²⁵The compilations of such tales containing *Jóns þáttr* will be discussed shortly.

above, he turns with marked enthusiasm to his chief concern with regard to Jón, adding to the laudative tone a mood of grateful affection towards the bishop as he remembered him in this particular capacity:

Now anyone can relate with what kindness [*góðvilji*] he would amuse people in his presence with the unusual and exemplary tales he had acquired abroad [*meðr fáheyrdum dæmisögum, er hann hafði tekit í útlöndum*], both from letters and personal experience [*bæði með letrum ok eiginni raun*], and as witness thereof we will give in this booklet but a very small part of that large matter [*setja í þenna bækling af því stóra efni*], for some men in Iceland compiled his stories [*samsettu hans frásagnir*] for their own and other people's pleasure. We will first give one anecdote [*æventýr*] from each school, Paris and Bologna, that took place while he was there.²⁶

Instead of describing Jón's years as diocesan administrator, the author concentrates therefore on what he appears to have regarded as the essence of Jón's image—the outstanding figure of Jón the preacher and raconteur, this member of an order alien to the country and whose distinctive mission was the salvation of souls through preaching.

Jón was thus to be remembered as an exceptional bishop in this respect despite the fact that sermons were only one of his many episcopal duties. His performances in this field, which evidently had strong ties with literary activities in Iceland, serve however not only to explain why he came to be remembered in this particular fashion, why *Jóns þáttir* is preserved in this manner or why the piece looks the way it does, for his celebrated sermons and the tales they enjoined must also be the most obvious reason why Jón was the only foreign

²⁶Trans. from *Íslendzk æventýri*, vol. 1, p. 84⁹⁻¹⁶.

bishop to receive special literary treatment in medieval Iceland.

All this is of course indicative of how *Jóns þáttr* is to be read. The material occupying most of the *þáttr* is indeed closely akin to the matter preserved with it, because in addition to the two tales mentioned in the quotation above, but whose place in Jón's sermons is quite obscure, there is a third and much longer tale that is said to be an *exemplum* given by Jón in a sermon of his at Staðarhóll in Iceland.

And yet the *þáttr* is not made entirely out of the three tales attributed to Jón. There are also to be read three passages about the man himself, the prefatory words quoted above, and two longer passages pertaining to Jón's death. But the biographical approach is not confined to these parts of the piece. Jón himself features in the tales from Paris and Bologna, and even the tale from his sermon at Staðarhóll seems to have biographical elements as well. These features should bring out the possibility of classifying *Jóns þáttr* within the genre of Bishops' sagas, as two of its editors have in fact done.

So in spite of its anecdotal and *exemplum*-like qualities, *Jóns þáttr* can be said to have a pronounced biographical thread, an element that implies a coherent authorial approach. Rather than recounting his deeds as a churchman, however, the *þáttr* resembles more closely something that can be described as a brief biography of Jón's inner man. Along with the *exempla* mentioned above, this is the second feature of *Jóns þáttr* that distinguishes it from the native Bishops' sagas, or at least the works of that genre that cannot be classified as saints' *vitae* with just as much ease.

Following the two tales about his student days abroad (and to be discussed later) there is a passage illustrating some sensitivity towards

Jón's insular existence when he was bishop of Skálholt, the friar's solitary and, in a certain sense, almost cloistered life in Iceland. This is clearly perceived against his background as a foreign Friar Preacher who had the privilege of being educated and acquiring eminent friends abroad. Evidently, even this the author could not describe without emotive reference to Jón's repertoire of tales:

It should not be forgotten in praise of this man, Bishop Jón Halldórsson, that he had schoolmates abroad that later became *cardinales*. This could be seen when some of them sent him their letters all the way north to Iceland, somewhat tinged, as it were, with sadness due to so great a distance of such a father and friend. This was not strange, for no man of such station could ease the mind and amuse others as he did [*þvíat engi maðr þvílíkrar stèttar mátti framarr fella sik til huglètis ok gleði*].²⁷

The sadly pensive mood here invoked is artfully accentuated by juxtaposing the great joy and pleasure of Jón's company to the wistful correspondence from his foreign friends, giving thereby a glimpse of what has been surrendered for the sake of Jón's office in far-away Iceland.

This exilic state of affairs becomes more acute when we are told how Jón's versatile table-talk and stories—a remarkable quality in a “man of such station” and one valued highly by dignitaries across the ocean—was misconstrued by some Icelanders as improper to his high office:

But because his audience was often not of one mind, he would adapt himself so as to make everyone amused by his words [*þá samði hann sik eptir því, at allir mætti*

²⁷Trans. from *Islandzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 87⁸³⁻⁸⁹. The only letters sent to Jón personally that have survived are two from his friend Bishop Hákon in Bergen, sent in 1337 and 1338. They are ed. by Jón Þorkelsson in *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1893), pp. 720-724.

gleðjaz af hans orðum]. Some of his tales were therefore both worldly and outspoken [*því voru frásagnir hans sumar bæði veralldligar ok stórorðar*], and there were people who found this to be a fault with him [*sumir menn lögðu honum til lýtis*], but only to appreciate it all the more now how his heart was rich in virtues and devoted to brotherly love, so that the words of the apostle would truly be fulfilled in him, that all things work together for the good of them that love God [*þeim er guð elskar snýr allt til hægri handar* (Rom. 8: 28)]. This seems verily fulfilled when it is reported of this blessed bishop that he is now glorified with innumerable signs, both where he lies buried in Bergen and widely elsewhere [*svá sem flytz af þeim blezaða biskupi er hér tignaz með útalligum táknum, bæði viðr sitt leg í Björgvin ok víðara annarsstaðar*].²⁸

Jón's ostensible faults are thus depicted as an illusion arising from the misconception of some of his more modest subjects when he only wished to serve his flock in the most appropriate manner, with the *góðvilji* previously applauded.

With this apology the author introduces his main theme in *Jóns þáttur*, the sanctity of Bishop Jón the exemplary preacher. The quibbles of the Icelandic audience and the lurking sense of Jón's discontent with his surroundings are simply seen as the sufferings of a saintly preacher in exile among less charitable people on earth, and the context of his trials is presented as proof of Jón's special sort of sainthood—his predicant sanctity. To put it another way, the divine word, manifested in the Preacher's sermons and tales, seems to be envisioned as a cordial bond between Jón and his fellow men (brotherly love) on the one hand, and between Jón and God (love of God) on the other. Although outwardly it might be misjudged due to inevitable human shortcomings, the ultimate witness in any matter, he who looks into the hearts of all men, has himself shown how Jón's

²⁸Trans. from *Íslendzka æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 87⁸⁹⁻⁹⁹.

expounding of his grace on the northern extremities of the habitable world constitutes a momentous merit worthy of posthumous miracles.

This somewhat strained but surprisingly emphatic transformation of Jón's ribald repertoire into one mighty certificate of sanctity is unique in Icelandic literature. It is clearly the work of a hagiographer trying to illustrate the first and only instance of predicator sanctity in Iceland. Indignation towards Jón's bawdy tales would of course have been recognized as problematic by any exponent of this appraisal of his preaching, and one wonders therefore why the author bothered to undertake the task. His reasons for depicting Jón in this way in a collection of sermon material seems to derive, at least partly, from his intention to present his readership with an exemplary preacher still remembered in Iceland and whose use of such tales as were to be found along with this account not only consecrated the author's compilation but offered also an example to be emulated by the priests in Iceland, which the author probably regarded at once as his ideal readers and peers.

More conjectural speculation about authorial motives will be presented later, but it should be noted how this description of God's triumphant vindication of Jón's preaching and use of *exempla* serves as a justification for the compiler's present activity, his own use and collection of sermon tales. This subtle alignment of the compiler with the saintly preacher portrayed in his collection becomes more clear when the reader comes across this brief statement halfway through the collection of *exempla* in one of the two medieval manuscripts containing *Jóns þáttur*:

This little booklet [*Bæklingr sjá hinn litli*] is compiled from those entertaining tales [*er samsettr af skemmtunarsögum þeim*] the venerable Lord Jón Halldórsson the bishop told to amuse men [*sagði til gamans mönnum*]; one may call them whichever one prefers, *sögur* or *ævintýr*.”²⁹

Whether these words in AM 624 4to, a miscellaneous vellum dating to about 1500, derive from the author of *Jóns þáttur* or a later scribe is impossible to determine. But they certainly hark back to the author's words about giving “in this booklet but a very small part of that large matter” attributed to Jón and the statement that “some men in Iceland compiled his stories for their own and other people's pleasure,” indicating that, in addition to the three tales attributed to the bishop in the *þáttur*, the four remaining stories in this same compilation are ultimately (in what way exactly we do not know) derived from Jón. As Gering demonstrated in his edition in considerable detail, mainly on the grounds of common characteristics of style, these tales too are almost certainly written by the author of *Jóns þáttur*. Gering called this writer for convenience's sake ‘Alpha’.

These are the four tales that follow the statement in 624 with the titles and numbers used in Gering's edition:

Afriddara og álfrkonu. (No. 85). Of the man who entered into a happy marriage with a helpful fairy for her wealth. She was finally forced to abandon him when his brother officiated in the couple's house and demanded her presence during the transubstantiation.

Afspekingi og dára. (No. 83) Of the simpleton sent by the Romans to acquire from the Greeks their books of wisdom and who ‘outwitted’ their philosophers in a gestural contest of wisdom, thereby receiving these books in token of respect. (The philosophers thought the issue of the contest was the mystery of the Trinity, while

²⁹Trans. from *Íslendzka ævintýri*, vol. 1, p. 246 (footnote).

the simpleton took the gestures as physical threats.)

Af presti og klukkara. (No. 88). Of the bell-ringer who travelled all the way to Rome from Denmark to receive absolution from the Pope for himself and his priest because of their drunken brawl. He bound his request to a stone which accidentally struck one of the cardinals on the nose and thus brought the matter to the Pope's attention and his prompt absolution.

Af dauða og kóngssyni. (No. 78) Of the prince who studied under the tutelage of Death and who acquired from him the bird *karadius* who would indicate with its behaviour if patients would die or survive. Later in life when he had become king, he outwitted his tutor during his illness by making Death agree not to take him before he had finished saying the paternoster. The king then left the final part unsaid until he saw fit to die. (This tale is closely related to folktales about bargains with the devil.)

For various reasons quickly comprehended when they are read, each of these four tales could easily, just as the previously discussed *Clarus saga*, have been deemed "worldly and outspoken" by some of Jón's prudish contemporaries. Such criticism may especially have arisen if they were given in sermons, and even more so in a place where those attending were not used to the employment of such matter in the pulpit, as must have been the case in many parts of Iceland, a country unfamiliar with the mendicants' common usage of *exempla* in their sermons.³⁰

It is also possible to regard the statement in 624 as indicating that the *entire* collection is ultimately derived from Jón. If this is the case, then one should also connect him with the tales that immediately precede in the manuscript those listed above. They are also the work of Alpha:

³⁰For general information about ON *exempla*, see A. Holtsmark: "Exempel in vn. litt." *KLNM*, vol. 4 (Copenhagen, 1959), cols. 97-98; A. Jakobsen: "Ævintýri.", cols. 614-616 and P. A. Jorgensen: "Exempla." *MSE*, pp. 173-174.

Af Gregorio páfa. (No. 15) Of how Gregory VI, due to his military campaign to free the Roman Church from the onslaught of evil men, was deemed on his deathbed unfit for sacred burial within St Peter's by his cardinals and how God vindicated him by miraculously opening the gates of St Peter's for his funeral procession.

—Next comes *Jóns þátttr.* (No. 23)—

Af Celestino og Bonifacio páfum (No. 22) There are three tales under this heading:

1. Of how a great and crafty cleric (Cardinal Benoit Gaetani), who is said to have been so worldly that he had twelve sons, managed by his impious tricks to convince the saintly and simple-minded Celestine V to resign so that he himself could become Pope Boniface VIII.

2. Of the Dominican on pilgrimage who, when being robbed in an ambush, unsheathed his assailant's sword and lopped his head off, and who was subsequently not only absolved but indeed commended for this feat by Boniface VIII.

3. Of the covetous Benedictine monks who tried to steal with force the corpse of a rich man in the midst of his funeral-service, and how the bold bell-ringer came to his priest's rescue beating the monks down with the pole carrying the holy cross. He was later commended by Boniface VIII for this valiant conduct.

Af ágirnd Absalons erkibiskups. (No. 19) Of how Archbishop Absalon in Denmark, when establishing a Benedictine monastery, in his covetousness excommunicated a poor peasant and confiscated his field. On his deathbed, the peasant sent a priest to tell the Archbishop that he now summoned him before the tribunal of God. The Archbishop fell dead when he heard the summons and his voice could be heard shortly thereafter from the corner of an altar begging the monks to pray for his wretched soul.

Trönuþátttr. (No. 89) Of the man who was transformed into a crane by his wicked mistress, but who with great luck retrieved his original shape and, on his return, changed the witch herself into a crane and lopped off one of her legs as she flew away.

(Next comes the brief statement about Jón's tales, the tale of the fairy mistress etc.)

Apart from the first tale—which must however have been recognized as propaganda for a most worldly and aggressive policy of the Church—these too may be described as rather scurrilous narratives.

Alpha's *exempla* in 624 are thus in keeping with his vindication of Jón's tales in *Jóns þáttir* found in the same compilation. But besides sharing the "worldly and outspoken" spirit attributed to the bishop's tales, those preceding the statement in 624 may be seen to have even stronger links with his name if the brief statement is understood as simply a belated note prompted by the scribe's realization that with *Trönupáttir* this collection of tales derived from Jón has clearly moved from famous or notorious leaders of the Church on to tales with anonymous protagonists.

Jóns þáttir and the other tales in 624's collection can be read as well in AM 657a-b, a manuscript dating to about 1350.³¹ It is thus the older of the two medieval manuscripts containing these tales and it is moreover the oldest manuscript of *Clarus saga* (although its beginning has there been torn away). 657 features many more tales attributed to Alpha by Gering, three of which (no. 81 in Gering's ed.) deal with the exploits of the same Master Perus who features so prominently in *Clarus saga*. 657 does however not contain 624's statement, quoted above, crediting Jón with some of the tales. Neither does it present the tales it shares with 624 in precisely the same sequence. There is the same order of Gregory VI, *Jóns þáttir* and the three tales concerning Boniface VIII, but these are the last tales in 657 and the tale of Archbishop Absalon along with the tales featuring anonymous protagonists appear elsewhere in the manuscript. Apart from the fact

³¹For information on the dating and contents of the MSS of *Jóns þáttir*, see *Islandzk æventýri*, vol. 1, pp. viii-xxxiv and notes on p. 84 where the text of the *þáttir* is edited. Gering's 764 B 4to (with the signature C³) is now classified as 657a-b since it was originally part of AM 657. Gering used, along with 624 and 657, the paper MS AM 1010, which is much younger. The relations between these three MSS and Lbs. 340b, d, Lbs 2796, JS 434to and JS 160 fol. (MSS Gering did not use) has yet to be worked out.

that 657 contains material of a far less ecclesiastical nature than 624, it is noteworthy that someone seems to have rearranged, abbreviated and refined some of Alpha's *exempla* appearing in 657 when he put together the much smaller collection preserved in 624. The nature of these changes will be discussed in another context, but it may be noted at this point that the collection in 624 appears to represent a later, or at least quite a different collection of *exempla* also made by Alpha. The most notable change in 624 is a prologue entirely different (apart from its style) to the much briefer and more secular one in 657.³²

By coming to Jón's defence with respect to his use of *exempla*, Alpha was thus vindicating his own collection of the same or similar literature. This is especially obvious when we consider the material gathered within 657, but Alpha could nevertheless, as we have seen, have remained uneasy with the *exempla* in 624. In any case, his defence rested primarily on the Preacher's saintly reputation, and Alpha reinforced his previously quoted comments on that subject with the following vision in *Jóns þátttr*.

It may justly be said that God gave a presage of this before Jón left Iceland for the last time. For during the previous night, before he set sail, he had a momentous vision. It seemed to him that he was already in Bergen among his brothers at the Preachers' priory and church, and he thought he was asked to deliver a *sermonem*. Walking therewith up onto the choir-loft, he commenced with this *thema*: *Beati mortui qui in domino moriuntur* [Rev. 14: 13]. On this he thought himself preach, and afterwards he looked around. There then stood one man on each side of him and he thought he recognized both [*ok þikkiz hann kenna báða*]: Archbishop Eilífr, his consecrating father, and King Magnus Hákonarson. Both of them had passed away. Now when he had completed the *sermonem*, the two of them took hold of him, each of them one arm, and they led him [back] up onto the choir-loft. They then came to a

³²See pp. 89-91..

ladder leading up through the church-roof and they thereupon went all the way up and out of the building. On the other side of the gable there could be seen a prepared bed, so it appeared to him, and there he was meant to rest [*sér hann þá annan veg yfir bustina sæng búna, sem honum sýndiz, ok þar skyldi hann hvílaz*].³³

The ladder rises from the place where Jón delivers his sermon on saintly death and the implications of his heavenly ascent are clear enough. But Alpha nevertheless presents the following interpretation to his readers, possibly introducing himself into the narrative:

He related this dream the following morning to a close friend of his [*einum sínum heimolligum vin*] who gave this reply: "You will there," he said, "be higher and more honoured than anything exalted in that church."

The bishop, however, looked at him very angrily and told him to be quiet, for it is the custom of God's servants to guard humility better than bright gold [*at geyma framarr lítillæti en fagrt gull*]. But what appeared to him towards the close of his life, just when he was preaching God's message, may justly be said to signify that God has for that very kind of service granted him a fair rest. For no man, in his native land or elsewhere, has been so graced with this gift within the memory of men [*í manna minnum*].³⁴

In spite of Alpha's emphasis on Jón's image as a Preacher, this vision and its interpretation is surely influenced by that widely read passage in the Rule of St Benedict on the ladder of humility:³⁵

[...] if we wish to attain the topmost height of humility and to come quickly to that heavenly excellence which in this present life we reach by humility, we must raise

³³Trans. from *Íslendzka æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 87⁹⁹-88¹¹⁵.

³⁴Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 88¹¹⁵-124.

³⁵There can no doubt be found a number of analogues to Jón's vision before he left Iceland, especially in hagiography, but it should be noted that F. C. Tubach seems not to have come across any in the collections of *exempla* he based his comprehensive catalogue on (*Jóns þáttir* contains the only tale of this type according to his list). See no. 1475 in his *Index exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious tales* (=Folklore Fellows Communications, vol. 204, Helsinki, 1969).

up—and by our acts we must ascend—that ladder which appeared to Jacob in his dream whereon he saw angels ascending and descending. This ascending and descending doubtless signify nothing else than an ascent by humility and a descent by pride. The ladder itself is our life on earth, raised up by God towards heaven for the humble in heart. The sides of the ladder we call our body and soul, and into these sides God has inserted steps of humility and discipline for our ascent.³⁶

Alpha next gives Jón's tale from his sermon at Staðarhóll (to be discussed later). After that, however, Alpha turns finally to the bishop's illness and death in Bergen on the second of February 1339:

When Bishop Jón arrived in Norway, he resided in Bergen for the winter at the Preachers' priory he had first entered already in childhood. He was taken ill after Christmas, not very seriously at first, but when it drew towards *purificationem sanctæ Mariæ*, he was ministered to and in all respects prepared for his passing by Hákon, his brother in consecration and at that time the bishop of Bergen.³⁷

As is anticipated by Jón's vision before he set sail to Norway, his passing is described as that of a saint. The date is of great moment, for to demonstrate his sanctity further Alpha elaborates on the conventional imagery of Candlemas Day, that is to say the feast of the Purification of Mary. This day commemorated the humility as well as the purity exemplified by Mary when she ascended with her child the steps into the Temple in Jerusalem forty days after the Virgin Birth to give her offerings according to the Law of Moses.

When Candlemas came, he grew much worse. Throughout his illness, he was eager and admirable in his reading of the Office, doing so day and night without fail. Early in the morning on the feast day itself he read the entire Office of our Lady the

³⁶This trans. from the seventh chapter of the Rule is taken from R. W. Southern's *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven and London, 1953), pp. 223-224.

³⁷*Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 93²⁴⁸⁻²⁵⁴.

Mother of God. When the hour of prime had passed, he sent word to the prior of the house requesting that he read for him Mary's mass with plainchants *de festo* in the chamber where he lay. While the mass was being celebrated, the Lord bishop lay in bed reclining somewhat against a cushion, and he gave the prior a blessing before the *evangelium*. But shortly after the Sacrament had been administered, the prior heard from him a faint snore, as it were, or a light slumber. This went on until he had completed the Service, at which moment the drowsiness departed from the Lord bishop and he gave a beautifully clear *benedictionem* after the mass. Now when the *benedictio* was completed and before the prior read *evangelium Johannis: in principio* [John 1: 1], he walked in full ceremonial dress away from the altar and approached the bishop's bed. He must have walked as quickly as he did by the will of God, for there was now not much time left to speak, as was soon to be revealed.

He said this: "My Lord," he said, "did you fall asleep a short while ago?"

The bishop replied: "I cannot clearly tell whether I fell into a swoon, fainted or slept, but I did see something."

"What did you see, my Lord?" said the prior.

"It seemed to me" he said, "that a gentle maiden and well clad walked into this chamber. Her dress resembled most that of good nuns and she held a burning candle in each hand. She approached my bed and thereupon went up to the ceiling and through the roof and I suspect she went to heaven.

The prior replied: "What do you think this means, my Lord?"

The bishop answered: "I am not sure. But if it were not the case, as I should fear, that my soul is weighed down with grave sins, then I would not think it unlikely that its image had here appeared to me and that its passage would lead to where she went in advance.

When these words had been spoken, the prior bowed to receive the blessing and read *evangelium Johannis*. The bishop blessed him then with these words: "*Dominus sit in corde tuo et in labiis tuis.*" They are translated thus: "May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips."

These words were the last he spoke in this world. He lost speech while the gospel was being read and sent forth his spirit as the bells of the town's cathedral rang *tertiam* on that blessed day of Our Lady the Mother of God. His body was buried with full honour in the church of that same priory, the one he had first entered and later served in under the Preachers' rule.³⁸

³⁸Trans. from *Islandzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 93²⁵⁴-94²⁹⁶.

The significance of Jón's vision on his deathbed would have been easy to grasp. In the Old Norwegian book of homilies (which dates from around 1200) it is said, for example, that

this feast is called the Purification of Saint Mary and it signifies the entrance of the righteous with their good works into the kingdom of Heaven. In our commemoration of this sign, we stand in the church with burning candles on this day. For the Lord said this in a gospel: 'May burning candles be in your hands [Luke 12: 35].' He made this more clear in another gospel and said: 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven [Matthew 5:16].'

[. . .] May the fire of love illuminate our hearts and the light of our good works burn in our hands so that our good examples illuminate the temple of God, that is to say, the Christian nation. May we hasten towards Christ with love and good conduct [. . .]³⁹

The idea of Jón's ascent on the ladder of humility is therefore in a sense resumed and elaborated with the humble and immaculate image of his soul as a "gentle maiden". She ascends to enter the kingdom of Heaven with his good works, the light from the two candles in her hands but the fire of which is perhaps meant to signify Jón's aforementioned love of God and his fellow men. This symbolism of light and fire seems to be paralleled in the bishop's final blessing, words that sum up the active and contemplative life of the ideal preacher.

It is obvious when one recalls the heavenly bed that awaited Jón at the end of the ladder in his previous vision that Alpha intended to

³⁹Trans. from *Gamla Norsk Homiliebok: Cod. AM 619°* (Oslo, 1931), ed. G. Indrebø, pp. 67-69. The homily on the Purification in the Old Icelandic book of homilies, which also dates from around 1200, is very similar.

portray Jón as a *sponsa Christi*. This was a dramatic departure from the conjugal symbolism conventionally employed in the more manly image of the bishop of Skálholt as the bridegroom of his cathedral church.⁴⁰ Icelandic readers had very likely small enthusiasm for this novel depiction of their former bishop, since a later scribe, or perhaps Alpha himself, dropped this last chapter in the version of *Jóns þáttr* in 624—although the bed still remains at the end of the ladder. Nevertheless, this vivid portrayal of Jón's soul is in keeping with the general perspective in *Jóns þáttr*, where Alpha tries to illustrate God's view of his saint and contrast it to the inferior appraisal of Jón's subjects. It may be said to be symptomatic of Alpha, departing in this from some Bishops' sagas again, that he gives no description of Jón's physical or outward appearance.

But there are sources that complement this spiritual profile. A number of documents derive from Jón's years in office,⁴¹ and he features in the biography of his Icelandic contemporary, Laurentius Kálfsson (born in 1267), who was bishop of Hólar between 1324 and 1331.⁴² *Laurentius saga* is certainly the last original (that is to say not rewritten and hagiographic) Bishop saga if *Jóns þáttr* is excluded from that genre.⁴³ Its author was almost certainly Laurentius' student, assistant and close friend Einar Hafliðason (1307-1393), who must have finished this work sometime after 1346 due to its mention of

⁴⁰See the note by J. Helgason on the older tradition in "Smástykker 3. Et sted i Hungrvaka." *Opuscula*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1960), pp. 352-353.

⁴¹Edited by J. Þorkelsson in *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1893) and to be found under the years 1322-1339 (i.e. among the material on pp. 510-725). Not all of these can with certainty be attributed to Jón's episcopacy.

⁴²Cf. F. Paasche: "Laurentius Kalvsson." *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, vol. 8 (Oslo, 1938), pp. 235-237.

⁴³*Laurentius saga biskups* (= *Rit Handritastofnunar Íslands*, vol. 3, Reykjavík, 1969), ed. Á. Björnsson.

Archbishop Árni Einarsson (1346-1349).⁴⁴ Einar travelled south in 1332 after Laurentius' death to be ordained by Jón Halldórsson, and he became a priest shortly thereafter in the diocese of Hólar. He was steward there in 1340 and became the bishop's deputy the next year, and after receiving Breiðabólstaður in 1344, he travelled through France for a year. He served again in 1370-1376 and 1391-92 as the steward and bishop's deputy at Hólar.⁴⁵ Einar is also credited with the so-called *Lögmannsannáll*.⁴⁶ This important work and five other Icelandic annals contain information on Jón Halldórsson's activities as bishop.⁴⁷

The sources say little about Jón's origins. The complete silence in the *páttr* about his family seems to exclude him from distinguished relations, for this would surely have been one of the things Alpha had to mention "in praise of this man". Yet a document from 1313 shows that Jón was the brother of Finn Halldórsson,⁴⁸ a cleric whom King Hákon V made in 1306 provost of the Apostle's Church in Bergen and two years later gave, for the very first time in Norway, the prestigious title *magister cappellarum regis*.

Where or when the brothers were born is not known, but seeing as Finn describes himself as being very ill and old in 1324 and that

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 92. For more information on the saga see J. H. Jørgensen: *Bispesagaer: Laurentius saga* (Odense, 1977) and Á. Björnsson: "Laurentius saga biskups." *MSE*, pp. 381-382.

⁴⁵Cf. E. Bull: "Einar Haflideson." *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, vol. 3 (Oslo, 1926), pp. 464-465.

⁴⁶*Islandske annaler indtil 1578* (Oslo, 1888), ed. G. Storm, pp. 233-296, annal no. VII.

⁴⁷Ibid., annals no. IV (*Konungsannáll*), V (*Skálholtsannáll*), VI (in AM 764 and beginning in 1327, called *Annalbrudstykke fra Skálholt* by the ed.), VIII (*Gottskálksannáll*) and IX (*Flateyjarannáll*).

⁴⁸*Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, vol. 7 (Christiania [Oslo], 1867), eds. C. R. Unger and H. J. Huitfeldt, no. 70. Cf. *Regesta Norvegica*, vol. 4 (Oslo, 1979), ed. E. Gunnes and H. Kjellberg, no. 815 (Jan. 22nd)

he died six years later, it may be gathered that he was Jón's elder and probably born before 1260.⁴⁹ Jón's alleged vision of King Magnus lagabætir escorting him to heaven indicates that Jón had in his youth known the king personally, for how else was he to have "recognized" him? Seeing as Magnus reigned from 1263 until his death in 1280, Jón's birth should therefore be placed at least a decade before the king's death.

No other source connects Jón and Finn. If the author of the annal in *Flateyjarbók* is not mistaken, then it would appear that their mother, or at least Jón's mother, bore the extremely rare name Freygerðr,⁵⁰ drawn from the mythical union of Freyr and Gerðr discussed earlier. Noting the annal's mention of the newly consecrated bishop as being "Freygerdaron",⁵¹ Gering conjectured that Jón's father, Halldór, had died while Jón was very young, for only widows' sons, at least in the sagas, were identified by their mothers' name.⁵² The statements at the beginning and end of *Jóns þáttur* to the effect that he entered the priory early in his childhood do not contradict this suggestion.

There is not room here for speculation about Jón's youth in the priory in Bergen, the exact nature and dates of his studies abroad or the question of what degree he may have achieved.⁵³ *Jóns þáttur*,

⁴⁹On Finn, see E. Bull: "Finn Halldorsson." *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, vol. 4 (Oslo, 1929), pp. 131-132 and K. Helle: *Konge og gode menn i norsk riksstyring ca. 1150-1319* (Bergen—Oslo—Tromsø, 1972), pp. 595-596.

⁵⁰See refs. (from *Landnáma* and *Vápnfirðinga saga*) in E. H. Lind: *Norsk-Islandske dopnamn och fingerade namn från medeltiden* (Uppsala and Leipzig, 1905-1915), p. 283.

⁵¹*Islandske annaler*, p. 395 (IX).

⁵²*Islensk æventyri*, vol. 2, p. vii (footnote no. 3).

⁵³For information about the Dominicans in medieval Scandinavia, see J. Gallén: "Dominicanorden." *KLNM*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen, 1958), cols. 174-185 and T. Nyberg: "Monasteries." *MSE*, pp. 415-419.

Laurentius saga and *Lögmannsannáll* do however agree that he studied for a long time in Paris and Bologna,⁵⁴ and one would suppose that he learnt theology in the former place and canon law in the latter.⁵⁵ The fact that Jón cannot be identified in any source prior to 1310, when he appears as a canon in the cathedral of Bergen,⁵⁶ accords with those sources that mention his lengthy studies abroad and so does Laurentius' remark that Jón spoke Latin as if it were his mother tongue.⁵⁷ All this seems to confirm Alpha's statement that Jón left Norway very young to spend most of his life "at studium", and that he returned to Norway as a man most learned and *fullkomin at alldri*.

Friar Jón had thus already entered into the service of the bishop in Bergen, Árni Sigurðarson (1305-1314), in 1310. Mention of him in documents dating from 1313, 1319 and 1320 makes it plain that he retained this position and thus served also under Bishop Auðfinnr Sigurðarson (1314-1330),⁵⁸ or until he himself was elected bishop in

⁵⁴*Laurentius saga*, p. 83²⁴⁻²⁵: "hafði hann leingi stadið vt lendis at studium j Bononia og Paris. j Franka ríki." *Lögmannsannáll* (for 1322): "var hann michilshattar klerkr ok stadið leingi utlendiss j Bononia ok Paris ad studium." *Íslandske annaler*, p. 267.

⁵⁵Jón's name is not found in the preserved matriculation documents from Bologna published in *Acta nationis Germanicae vniuersitatis Bononiensis ex archetypis tabularii Malveziani* (Berlin, 1887), eds. E. Friedländer and C. Malagola. These documents cover the years 1289-1543, but they do not contain the names of all students in the period Jón studied there. For other literature relating to this issue, see Å. Sällström: *Bologna och Norden intill Avignonpåvedørets tid* (=Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis, vol. 5, Lund, 1957) and S. Bagge: "Nordic Students at Foreign Universities until 1660." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 9 (1984), pp. 1-29 and refs. there given.

⁵⁶*Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, vol. 1 (Christiania [Oslo], 1852), ed. C. C. A. Lange, no. 126 (Feb. 19th).

⁵⁷*Laurentius saga*, p. 116¹³.

⁵⁸These documents are found (respectively) in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, vol. 7, no. 70; vol. 4 (Christiania [Oslo], 1860), ed. C. C. A. Lange, nos. 131 and 135 (both in the same year); vol. 8 (Christiania [Oslo], 1869), ed. C. R. Unger and H. J. Huitfeldt, no. 55. See also *Regesta Norvegica*, vol. 3, nos. 815, 1138, 1146 and vol. 4, no. 24.

1322.⁵⁹ It must therefore have been in the cathedral church of the Holy Trinity that Jón gained recognition for his administrative capabilities and renown came to him as a preacher; *Laurentius saga* gives a succinct description of the new bishop of Skálholt, saying that he was a *mikilshattar klerkr ok agætur predikare*.⁶⁰

There is another passage in the same saga mentioning Jón's great learning. He is there credited with the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi not only in his own bishopric, but also in that of Laurentius':

At that time the aforementioned Lord Jón governed Skálholt and Lord Laurentius Hólar. Men said that there had hardly been in Iceland better Latin scholars [*latinu klerkar*] than these two, and there was great affection between them at the time. In the second year of Laurentius' episcopate, he ordered with the agreement of all clerics in the diocese of Hólar that the *festum corporis Christi* should be solemnly sung as a *sumum festum*, for Lord Jón the bishop had recently introduced this in Iceland. This feast became law at *alþingi* during the summer.⁶¹

This took place in 1326 and Jón had ordained Laurentius' son Árni, the author of *Dunstanus saga*, earlier in the same year.⁶²

The year 1326 also witnessed Jón's arguably most important statute, the so-called *bannsakabréf* or list of twenty-four automatically excommunicable crimes. This document will be mentioned later and in connection with Jón's collection of Peter's Pence between 1330 and 1337, which was done in response to a papal letter from the former

⁵⁹Jón's election is briefly described in *Laurentius saga biskups*, p. 82¹³-83⁶.

⁶⁰"a great scholar and an excellent preacher." Trans. from *Laurentius saga*, p. 83⁵. The other main MS has, in addition to the description of Jón as being a *heidarligur madr*, the words "dyrr klerkr ok sæmiligr predikari." Ibid. p. 83²²⁻²⁴. *Lögmanssannáll* (1322) has only "michilshattar klerkr." *Íslandske annaler*, p. 267.

⁶¹Trans. from *Laurentius saga*, p. 103²³⁻³¹.

⁶²*Laurentius saga*, p. 103¹²⁻¹⁷.

year which unfortunately does not survive although it is mentioned in the annals.

Jón Halldórsson's friendly relations with his northern colleague became strained in 1327 due to a dispute about the Augustinian monastery at Möðruvellir in the diocese of Hólar, the so-called *Möðruvallamál*. The monastery had burnt down in 1316, apparently because the monks put fire to it whilst drunk, and they demanded that the new Bishop of Hólar (Laurentius was consecrated in 1323) rebuild their house. Jón became the Archbishop's judge-delegate in this matter and came at first, on July 29th 1327, to a good agreement with Laurentius and the monks at a meeting at Möðruvellir. But it is related in *Laurentius saga* that the monks early in the next year lied about Laurentius' conduct to Jón and that they incited him to travel north for the second time. This lamentable turn of events is in the saga entirely attributed to the ungrateful monks, and Jón is thus excused for having forced Laurentius to a different settlement at a second and far less amicable meeting at Möðruvellir.

Jón learnt later in the year 1328 that Laurentius had sent Egill Eyjólfsson to Archbishop Eilífr to present his case in this dispute. The saga relates that Jón sent in turn "the priest he held in highest regard in his bishopric, which was Sir Arngrímr Brandsson."⁶³ Egill and Arngrímr quickly became great friends according to the author of *Laurentius saga*, who comically contrasts their conduct, describing how Egill diligently presented the case before the Archbishop throughout the winter, winning at first the Archbishop's admiration and finally the case itself, but adding that "Sir Arngrímr spent his

⁶³Trans. from *ibid.*, p. 1227-9.

days differently, for he went daily to an organmaster in Trondheim and had him teach him to make an *organum*. But never did he plead before the Archbishop about Möðruvallamál.”⁶⁴ Egill became bishop of Hólar in 1332 and died in 1341, but his friend Arngrímr will receive separate treatment later in this study.

Möðruvallamál is, not surprisingly, a major issue in the northern annals and it is interesting to see how the sympathy for Laurentius and complacent comments about the conclusion of the dispute in *Lögmannsannáll* and *Flateyjarbók* contrasts with the curt notices in the annals from Jón's diocese which only mention his re-establishment of the monastery at Möðruvellir and say nothing whatsoever about how the whole matter ended.⁶⁵ Alpha, however, does not mention the Möðruvallamál at all. But this is perhaps not only because of the embarrassing outcome, for Alpha was interested in quite different aspects of the bishop's career. His high learning as a Friar Preacher is an essential part of Alpha's portrayal of him, and we shall now turn to the two tales that concern Jón's student days abroad.

⁶⁴Trans. from *ibid.*, p. 123¹¹⁻¹⁴.

⁶⁵This is all that is said about Möðruvallamál in the southern annals: IV (1328): “hofz klustr a Modru vollum i Horgar dal með styrk ok bodi herra Jons biskups.”; V (1328): “Norðr ferð herra Jons byskups ok Þorlaks abota. Eft klaustr í annat sinn á Mauðru völlum.” VIII (1328): “Vppreist klavstur æ Modruvöllum j Horgar dal epter bodskap ercibyskups og atgongv herra Jons byskups.” *Íslandske annaler*, pp. 153, 206 and 347 respectively.

Chapter two

A tempest in Paris and a lion in Bologna

Jón's tale from Paris runs as follows:

Shortly after he had arrived in Paris, he entered the most illustrious school there was. He was in his youth at the time and of little understanding compared to later. From the very beginning, and this would persist long into his later years, God always granted him much favour among men, especially those most dignified and wise. The head master and whole congregation in the school had therefore much affection and high regard for the youth, as may be seen in what follows.

It so happened one day when the master was reading in his book, which was very great in size, that he begged to relieve himself outside the school and laid the open book down on his high seat before walking out. Now the aforementioned boy was at once curious to know how well he could read a *capitulum* from his master's book. He therefore ran up the steps which led to the seat and began to read what met the eye. But when he had read one *capitulum*, a creaking din struck the house with a furious storm, as if everything were being thrown into disorder, and at that very moment the doors were opened. When Jón heard this and understood that the master was about to come in, he hurried as he could back to his seat.

As the master came rushing in, he said and swore by the name of Almighty God that if this storm continued into the evening it would make every lake in France dry. "Or how is it," he said, "did none of you play mischief with my book after I left?"

Now the boy Jón was so popular that not one wished to inform against him. "And I therewith sensed," said Bishop Jón, "that I had sat as long as I could. I fell forth contrite, confessing what I had done, and the master answered me thus: 'I will be lenient with you, Jón,' he said, 'but yet you should be wary of what you might read while you do not better understand.'"

The master thereupon hastened up towards the book and turned to another page. "He then read one *capitulum*," said the Lord Bishop Jón, "and it seemed to me of about the same length as the one I had read previously. And without delay, as the *capitulum* was completed, the storm fell so suddenly that there was absolute calm. One can infer from events such as these," said the bishop, "how much art endures in

books although the world grows old."⁶⁶

This anecdote has qualities wholly foreign to the Benedictine beehive of learning Jón's subjects would have been familiar with from hagiography.⁶⁷ Its fast and feverish pace belongs instead to the fantastic lore that arose with the universities and new religious orders on the continent, such as that of St Dominic's, developments that had small impact in Iceland but allowed young men elsewhere to dedicate themselves in a way unprecedented to the pursuit of higher learning, whether this merely entailed lucubrations at night or the more unhealthy study of what many would brand as magic.

No medieval parallel to the humorous tale about Jón's ignorant use of his master's book of spells has been traced, although hundreds of variants from more recent times are known throughout Europe.⁶⁸ These are usually attached to some historical personage of renowned and outlandish learning, such as Jón Halldórsson, and it is hardly a coincidence that the only tale from medieval Iceland truly akin to Jón's concerns Sæmundr fróði ('the Learned', 1056-1134). This is the legend found in the second version of *Jóns saga helga*, written about the same time as *Jóns pátttr*, relating how St Jón Ögmundarson (bishop of Hólar 1106-1121) found the said Sæmundr in France, where he

⁶⁶Trans. from *Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 84-86.

⁶⁷On this tradition in Iceland see, P. G. Foote: "The B Version of *Jóns saga helga*: Two Benedictine Associations?" *Sagnaping helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni stjötugum* vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 1994), pp. 181-187.

⁶⁸See *Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 2, p. 77; R. T. Christiansen: *The Migratory Legends* (=Folklore Fellows Communications, vol. 175, Helsinki, 1958), pp. 28-35; S. Thompson: *The Types of the Folktale: Antti Aarne's Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* (=Folklore Fellows Communications, vol. 184, Helsinki, 1961), nos. 325 and 1171-1180. For further information on these tales cf. S. Thompson: *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Copenhagen, 1955-1958): "D1421.1.3. Magic book summons genie." and refs. there given.

was studying under a great master of *astronomiam*.⁶⁹ Sæmundr had forgotten his name and origins, but the saint managed to revive his memory and convince him to return with him to their homeland. After an exciting chase involving magical tricks to make the master gather from the appearance of Sæmundr's star that his pupil had died, the master finally granted that Sæmundr has learnt enough and gave up his pursuit. Such tales as this one presuppose the great power of high learning, an attitude summed up nicely in Jón Halldórsson's words at the end of his Parisian tale about "how much art endures in books although the world grows old."

Jón's tale seems therefore to be among the oldest variants extant of a significant type of migratory legend. It should be mentioned in this context how *Clarus saga* is filled with the sort of magic featuring in Jón's tale from Paris, that is to say, the 'bookish' kind of magic from the continent that was so different to that more indigenous sort treated in the Icelandic sagas.⁷⁰ In this saga, Master Perus governs a sort of Magician state for three years, creates fabulous automats to captivate Princess Serena's mind, and he in fact initiates by his art the entire adventure described in the romance. He does this by describing to his pupil the beauty and wisdom of Princess Serena and Clarus is to compose a Latin poem on this matter before the following morning. But instead, the prince becomes love-sick, his whole mind is infected by the phantasms conjured up by his master's speech.⁷¹

⁶⁹See pp. 227-229 in G. Vigfússon's ed. of *Jóns saga helga B* found in *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1858).

⁷⁰For the raising of storms in this native tradition see J. Granlund: "Vindmagi." *KLNM*, vol. 20 (Copenhagen, 1976), cols. 98-100.

⁷¹See *Clárisaga*, pp. 5-8. Clarus is there said to have been unable to sleep, drink and eat after Perus described Serena to him, i.e. the classical symptoms of magically induced love and not unlike those mentioned in the description of Freyr's sudden

There is one element of interest that Gering did not mention in his note on this tale in *Jóns þátr*. This is the saying *setið er (var) nú meðan sætt er (var)*, loosely translated here into "I have (had) sat as long as I could." These curious words appear only once in Old Icelandic literature apart from *Jóns þátr*, and their context may be important to our understanding of Jón's tale.

This second instance features in one of the more memorable episodes of a well-known haunting, the so-called *Fróðárundr*, or the Marvels at Fróðá, which are said to have taken place around the year 1000. These events are described in *Eyrbyggja saga*, which was perhaps written around 1250.⁷² In the *dýradómr* held in the farm's main doorway, the judicial exorcism of the eighteen revenants who had haunted the farmstead of Fróðá over Christmas, one of the chief revenants, Þórir viðleggr ('Wooden-Leg'), utters these exact words when he has heard the sentence passed over his troublesome activities. He therewith stands up from among his fellow revenants, says *setið er nú meðan sætt er*, and leaves the farm promptly.⁷³

Now this episode is not dissimilar to Jón's tale from Paris. Jón sits among his fellow students when the schoolmaster rushes through the door and accuses them of having played mischief with his book, unleashing a magical storm while he was relieving himself outside the school. In response, Jón thinks of the saying and promptly falls forth contrite admitting to his offence in utter humility. But this is not all. When Þórir viðleggr has departed with these words in *Eyrbyggja*, his

love for Gerðr in *Snorra Edda*.

⁷²See *Eyrbyggja saga* (= *Íslensk fornrit*, vol. 4, Reykjavík, 1935), eds. E. Ó. Sveinsson and M. Þórðarsson, pp. 137-152 (chapters 50-55).

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 152 (chapter 55).

wife Þorgríma galdrakinn ('Magic-Face'), stands up to leave through the door as well after her sentence has been pronounced, and she says *verið er nú meðan vært er*.⁷⁴ These words are not easy to translate, but they must refer to the fact that the longed for calm has been attained, that the intolerable haunting is now at an end.

It is thus reasonable to assume that familiarity with this rather enigmatic episode of the famous haunting prompted Jón or Alpha to insert the words as a potential Wellerism or quotation-saying realizing that a not dissimilar situation was being described. It does at any rate seem highly unlikely that this strange and unusual phrase should in both instances by some accident be found along with these peculiar situational features. Nothing in the words themselves makes them relevant to such marvellous occurrences. They seem only to possess such relevance, most importantly the repentant ring to them when uttered at the threshold of spiritual transition, the realization of the soul's capability of being redeemed from sin, if they have already become firmly attached to the Marvels at Fróðá.

A scribe of AM 764 4to, a miscellaneous manuscript from the latter half of the fourteenth century, takes this tale from Paris as his only excerpt from *Jóns þátttr*. He appears not to have appreciated the implications of the saying, since it, along with Jón's confession and contrition, is entirely dropped in his version. And when contrasted to Alpha's version the omission in 764 seems to reveal the role of Jón's saying in the over-all design of the *þátttr*. Without it there disappears the correspondence with the 'door-doom' at Fróðá that invokes the image of Jón's eager first steps on his way to heaven, as well as that

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 152. This proverb, or variant of a proverb, does not appear elsewhere in ON literature.

of a door leading into the next tale of the piece.

A doorway features more prominently in Jón's tale from his days in Bologna:

As for Bologna, he related the following event that took place while he dwelt there.

Two schoolfellows there had the same name. One of them had come as far from the west as England and their names were rendered thus in the school for distinction that one was called *Johannes Nordmannus* and the other *Johannes Anglicus*. It needs to be noted in this tale that the cathedral in Bologna was designed in such a way that there are two large lion-heads situated in the portal, one on each side, as if they were peering at one another with gaping maws.

Now it so happened one day that the schoolfellows we have named walked amicably together out of the cathedral. As they passed through the portal, Jón the Englishman looked back towards one of the lion-heads and said smiling to his namesake: "I had a strange vision last night," he said, "I thought myself walk this way and just as I entered the portal it seemed to me that one of the lion-heads came to life and bit off my right hand. Now tell me, friend, what this should signify, for you Northmen interpret dreams well."

Brother Jón thought the vision strange, but merely replied with the usual adage that bad dreams often forebode trifles.

They then went for a walk round the cathedral speaking of this and that, turning finally southwards and back to the portal. And just as they were about to enter, Jón the Englishman reached with his right hand and pointed a finger into the mouth of one of the lions saying this: "It was this very lion I thought bit off my hand last night."

But in the twinkling of an eye, just when he had so spoken, he tumbled in onto the cathedral-floor as if killed. And this was indeed so, for he breathed no more.

Now the cause of this weird occurrence was revealed by the search of shrewd men: Into the lion-head's mouth, where it was dark, there had crawled a viper [*höggormr*] that is called *aspis*. Its poison is so deadly, that when any man's limb touches the tip of its tail, his death will be so sudden, that it is as if spears were shot through the heart, as the said event attests.⁷⁵

⁷⁵Trans. from *Islendzka æventyri*, vol. 1, pp. 86⁵¹⁻⁷⁶-87⁸².

Alexander Haggerty Krappe was the first person to point out that Jón's weird Bolognese tale belongs to a very large family of European legends from ancient and medieval times.⁷⁶ These legends vary greatly in detail, but the most common features can be described very roughly as follows. Some notable man receives a prophecy, foreboding or curse to the effect that a certain animal will be the cause of his death. Those close to him or he himself tries to prevent this from coming true and the animal ultimately dies or is killed. Its body is either brought to the man or he returns to the place where it lies, and he then boasts or ridicules the prophecy that now appears to be utterly false. But the proud man makes a fatal gesture at this point and a snake, scorpion or some other small thing hidden in or under the animal's corpse, often in its skull or head, is unexpectedly provoked and poisons the man, usually in the hand or foot, and he subsequently dies so that the prophecy comes true. The underlying conception in these legends seems to a belief in the ineluctable fate of mortal man exemplified in the death of hubristic heroes.

Krappe demonstrated furthermore that Jón's tale belongs to a certain subgroup of this migratory legend where the motif of the so-called *bocca della verità*, or the 'mouth of truth', replaces the dead animal.⁷⁷ Krappe's oldest example of this subtype featuring an

⁷⁶See A. H. Krappe: "Parallels and Analogues to the Death of Örvar Odd." *Scandinavian Studies* 17 (1942-1943), pp. 20-35. A. Taylor had in an earlier study of this group of legends not mentioned Jón's tale. See his "The Death of Örvar Oddr." *Modern Philology* 19 (1921-1922), pp. 93-106.

⁷⁷For the distribution of this motif see refs. in Thompson's *Motif-Index*: "H251.1. *Boccadella Verità*. Person swearing oath places hand in mouth of image. If oath is false the hand is bitten off." Krappe's *The Science of Folklore* (London, 1930), pp. 124-125 may be added to Thompson's list. One must also point to the Norse myth about the loss of Týr's right hand, which seems related to the legends under discussion. There are other narratives from medieval and more recent times in Scandinavia that should be discussed in this context, most importantly the death of

inanimate representation of a beast with a gaping maw is found in one of Martial's epigrams:

Proxima centenis ostenditur ursa columnis,
exornant fictae qua platanona ferae.
huius dum patulos adludens temptat hiatus
pulcher Hylas, teneram mersit in ora manum.
vipera sed caeco scelerata latebat in aere
vivebatque anima deteriore fera.
non sensit puer esse dolos, nisi dente recepto
dum perit. o facinus, falsa quod ursa fuit!⁷⁸

The motif of foreknowledge or warning is missing in this instance, but this is not the case in the medieval variant of this subtype Krappe considered closest to Jón's tale. It is, quite significantly, also derived from Italy, and it appears in Francesco Petrarca's (1304-1375) treatise from 1343-1345 entitled *Rerum memorandarum libri*:

Simile quiddam vel legi vel audiui: sompniasse quendam morderi se a leone marmoreo ex hiis qui in templorum vestibulis cerni solent et morsum provenire mortiferum. Die autem postero cum templi fores casu preteriret, leone conspecto non sine risu sompnum suum inter comites renarrantem et manum in apertum os illius protinus iniecta dicentem: 'En nocturnus hostis meus', scorpionem, qui in imis faucibus leonis forte delitescebat, letaliter pupugisse. Sed domi iam satis sompniatum est.⁷⁹

Baldr.

⁷⁸"Next to the Hundred Columns, where wild beasts in effigy adorn the plane-grove, is shown a bear. While fair Hylas was in play challenging its yawning mouth he plunged into its throat his youthful hand. But an accursed viper lay hid in the dark cavern of the bronze, alive with a life more deadly than that of the beast itself. The boy perceived not the guile but when he felt the fang and died. Oh, what a crime was this, that unreal was the bear!" Text and trans. from Martial: *Epigrams* (London, 1947), ed. and trans. by W. C. A. Ker, pp. 174-175.

⁷⁹"This is similar to something I read once or heard. A certain man dreamt that he received a deadly bite from a marble lion of the sort that is often seen in the entrance to temples. The following day, when he happened to pass the portal of a temple, he

The version in *Jóns þáttir* is told with much more precision, vivid detail and dramatic tension before the climax, but the similarities between the two accounts are nevertheless striking.

Krappe did not note in his study that Petrarch had once been a student in Bologna. He studied civil law there with a few interruptions between 1320 and 1326.⁸⁰ These studies formed a part of Petrarch's fascination with ancient Rome, the humanist scholarship that led him, as a pious Christian, to employ in his writings examples of men from antiquity for moral improvement.

Petrarch's exemplary use of the past is perhaps best reflected in his unfinished work, the *Rerum memorandarum libri*, where the curious tale about the scorpion is to be found. Krappe did not attend to the context of Petrarch's use of the tale, although this issue must be of interest when speculating about the general import of the tale and its variants.

This work of Petrarch was conceived as a grand treatise on the cardinal virtues (and possibly the vices as well), where his own statements were followed by a number of *exempla* about the ancients, first those in Rome and then the Greeks. Figures from more recent times would sometimes follow, but the material was mainly drawn from ancient history and literature to form a sort of literary temple of virtues. In the 'vestibule', or introductory Book, the necessary preludes to virtue are discussed, which are leisure, solitude, study and

caught sight of the lion. Not without laughing, he told his companions of the dream and put his hand forthwith into the open mouth of the lion, saying: "Behold, my nocturnal enemy!" A scorpion who happened to be hiding in the lion's mouth gave him a deadly bite. And yet he had already slept enough at home." Trans. from *Rerum memorandarum libri* (Florence, 1943), ed. G. Billanovich, p. 233.

⁸⁰Cf. E. H. Wilkins: *Life of Petrarch* (Chicago, 1961), pp. 6-9.

doctrine. In the second Book, Petrarch initiates a very long treatment of Prudence, of which *memoria* is the first of its three components treated. Book three deals with the understanding of things present (*intelligentia*), but the fourth and unfinished book, discusses foresight into the future (*providentia*), the third and last part of Prudence.

The tale about the man killed by the scorpion is found in the fourth Book, in a section about the oracles, prophecies and dreams of the ancient Romans. Petrarch regrettably gave no commentary on the tale in question. But seeing as the subject is at this point in the work prudential foresight, and considering that Petrarch was reminded by the preceding tale about Aterius Ruffus (who was killed by a certain gladiator in spite of being warned of this in a dream) of the tale about the deadly scorpion, one gathers that with his brief and enigmatic tale he intended to demonstrate yet again the value of prudent *providentia*.

It is remarkable that two very close variants within an enormous and widespread family of legends come from two men both of whom studied for some time in Bologna and who did so in roughly the same period. It is therefore all the more noteworthy that neither Gering nor Krappe sought to ascertain whether there actually was a church-portal with two lions in Bologna around 1300. Perhaps they assumed, due to the fabulous and migratory character of the legend, that the lion-portal had no basis in reality. And in any case, had they examined the churches now standing in the city, they would certainly not have found any lions in the portal of the *höfuðkirkja*, or cathedral, of Bologna. The present San Pietro was built in the seventeenth century, shortly after the destruction of the medieval one

around 1600, and it has no lions in its portal.⁸¹

There was nevertheless a famed portal with two lions in the medieval cathedral of Bologna. According to several sources studied in detail by A. Manaresi in 1911,⁸² this was the south portal of San Pietro, facing the via Altabella, and it was built between 1220 and 1223 in the archiepiscopate of Enrico della Fratta (1213-1240). At the time it faced a public square. It therefore served as the main entrance and this explains why a grandiose portal was built there instead of in the west front as custom prescribed. According to Manaresi, this principal portal would have been known in the whole of Emilia due to all the processions, executions, plays and of course, sermons, that took place there.⁸³ It must moreover be noted that the two large lions in red Verona marble that once stood in this portal still exist inside San Pietro, although they now function as holy-water stoups instead of supporting columns. Both have their heads turned to one side, one to its left, and the other to its right, so that they would indeed have gaped at one another in the ancient portal. The onlooker can easily imagine some little creature hiding in the dark cavity of either mouth.⁸⁴

It is significant that Manaresi was unfamiliar with the tale of this portal in *Jóns þátttr*. Although several annals and chronicles

⁸¹They might have considered mentioning the west front of San Giacomo Maggiore, which has two lions in the portal which dates from around 1300. See G. P. Aprato et al.: *Il tempio di San Giacomo Maggiore in Bologna: Studi sulla storia e le opere d'arte regesto documentario* (Bologna, 1967), pp. 43, 46 and figs. I and 3.

⁸²"La 'Porta dei Leoni' nell'antica cattedrale di Bologna." *Bollettino della diocesi di Bologna*, pp. 345-355.

⁸³Manaresi, *La 'Porta dei Leoni'*, p. 352.

⁸⁴On these lions, cf. R. Grandi: *I monumenti dei dottori e la scultura a Bologna (1267-1348)* (Bologna, 1982), pp. 68, 105 and 126. Pictures of one of the lions are found in figs. 174 and 175. The lions of San Pietro may have inspired those in San Giacomo which are also of red Veronese marble but about eighty years younger.

preserving late medieval traditions mention the *porta leonum* in San Pietro, the first and by far the most important account comes from the Bolognese Dominican Leandro degli Alberti (1479 to ca. 1552), a well known historian and Inquisitor. His detailed description can be read in his *Historie di Bologna*, published between 1541 and 1591. Alberti has no legend to relate, but there are a number of features in his description that might throw some light on Jón's legend:⁸⁵

There was also erected the portal of the said church [of St Peter] that also faced the meridian, named *la porta de' Lioni*, for it was partly supported by two marble lions, by [Master] Ventura, excellent statuary of the times [. . .] two great lions, (as we said), of red marble (that is one on each side), supporting the first two columns, upon which has been planted an artful arch, beyond which [that is behind the two lions] there are to be seen two men sitting, one young, and the other old and with a great beard, supporting with their shoulders one column, each very distinctly fashioned, because that which is supported by the young one is contorted and wound, and the other, supported by the old man, contains [. . .] four columns [. . .] Above the artful capitals of the said columns there terminates a marble arch engraved with beautiful works. Occupying as much space behind [i.e. towards the door] there rise some subtle columns placed above the foundations in the pavement. The arch extends from the columns that repose on the shoulders of the two men and terminates at the columns sustained by the lions [creating thus a porch]. The said arch [i.e. the ceiling of the porch] is divided into twelve parts denoting the twelve months of the year, to which correspond the twelve celestial signs signifying the two parts of the year, of which one increases and the other decreases according to the ascent and the descent of the sun in our hemisphere [. . .]⁸⁶ one of the two men denotes the first half of the year, the young one [*il giovine*] sustaining the contorted column, demonstrating that this part is very dubious with respect to what will follow, and the old one [*il vecchio*] the other half, that declines into old age [*vecchiezza*], having need for a solid support [. . .] On both sides of the door are seen those subtle columns [in the splay], with the accompanying ornate capitals,

⁸⁵I have been unable to consult a copy of Alberti's work and therefore base the following loose trans. on the text reproduced in Manaresi's paper.

⁸⁶Manaresi appears to omit here some digression about the significance of the zodiac.

sustaining some artful arches, in the middle of which and above the door appears the image of Christ our Servant, having at his right the image of St Peter with the sun above the head, and on his left St Paul with the moon, denoting that for the teaching of the said apostles the spiritual world has been illuminated, just like the material world is illuminated by the sun and the moon [. . .] there are other animal figures above this artful edifice [i.e. on the second level on top of the porch], which I will await the interpretation of by those more curious than myself. This was truly made with great masterful skill and expense.

Jón's appears to be the only legend attached to the ancient portal, and it may give important clues as to how this structure was perceived at the time. His *aspis* might very well have featured among the animal symbols that adorned the ceiling of the portal's porch, but whether or not it did so, it is certain that the scorpion was to be seen there, since the arched ceiling was divided into twelve sections representing the months of the year and bearing the signs of the zodiac. As the eighth sign of the zodiac (the sun passes through it between October 24th and November 21st) it would have featured towards the bottom of the western or left half of the arch's ceiling, where it would, like the old and bearded man, be associated with the latter half of the year, namely late autumn, and thereby be a sign tending towards old age and death. This has in fact been the scorpion's conventional significance since antiquity.⁸⁷ Petrarch's scorpion seems in fact to be more original to this particular subtype of the legend than the *aspis* when one bears in mind how the latter is clearly contaminated in Jón's tale by an attribute of the scorpion. One wonders therefore how the *aspis* came to replace the scorpion in Jón's version, and whether there

⁸⁷Cf. S. Braunsfels: "Skorpion." *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 4 (Freiburg—Basel—Vienna, 1972), cols. 170-172.

is to be found any justification for it being, or so it would appear, superimposed onto the tale.

Firstly, the *aspis* was a very common symbol of evil, and it was in this capacity easily interchangeable with the scorpion in Christian art and literature, chiefly because of this triumphant promise of Christ (Luke 10: 19): "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents [*super aspidem*] and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

Secondly, the following information from a bestiary of the twelfth century, lore that was transmitted throughout Europe at the time in similar works, may help to explain why Jón's *aspis* does not bite, as any snake ought to, but has instead a tail like the scorpion which terminates in a venomous sting and can in this respect too become interchangeable with the scorpion:

The asp gets its name because it injects and spreads poison with its bite. For the Greeks call venom 'Ios', and hence comes 'Aspis', since it destroys with a venomous sting [. . .]

Now, it is said, when an Asp realizes that it is being enchanted by a musical snake-charmer, who summons it with his own particular incantations to get it out of its hole, that the Asp, being unwilling to come out, presses one ear to the ground and closes the other ear by sticking its tail in it, to shut it up. Thus, not hearing the magical noises, it does not go forth to the chanting.⁸⁸

The asp's ingenious use of its tail might thus have been a factor in creating the apparently unparalleled information on it in *Jóns þáttur* to the effect that it injects its poison by using its tail. But how naturally

⁸⁸*The Book of Beasts: Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century* (London, 1954), trans. and ed. by T. H. White, p. 173. This is a trans. of the MS li 4. 26 in the University Library of Cambridge. For the original text, see M. R. James' facsimile ed.: *The Bestiary* (Oxford, 1928), fol. 48b.

it would have appealed to Jón or any other preacher recounting the tale from Bologna is borne out by the sequel to the quotation above:

Such indeed are the men of this world, who press down one ear to worldly desires, and truly by stuffing up the other one they do not hear the voice of the Lord saying 'He who will not renounce everything which he possesses cannot be my disciple or servant'. Apart from men, asps are the only other creatures which do such a thing, namely, refuse to listen. Men make their own eyes blind, so that they do not see heaven, not do they call to mind the works of the Lord.⁸⁹

This didactic import of the *aspis* renders it quite apt in a tale explicitly recognized elsewhere as dealing with prudent foresight,⁹⁰ and the scorpion seems therefore to have been replaced with this creature to make the tale more applicable to moral instruction. The emphatic words at the end of Jón's tale may perhaps be the remains of just such a lesson drawn from the weird event, demonstrating that this quality of the asp is a poison "so deadly, that when any man's limb touches the tip of its tail, his death will be so sudden, that it is as if spears were to be shot through the heart."⁹¹

The medieval symbolism surrounding the lion is far more complex than that of the scorpion and asp, but seeing as the king of beasts often symbolized pride and bearing in mind the fact that pride is the chief attribute of the man who dies in this family of legends Jón's tale belongs to, then Johannes Anglicus' dream should perhaps

⁸⁹*The Book of Beasts*, p. 174 (trans. from fol. 49a). Five species of asp are described on pp. 174-175. A brief summary of this lore is found in the ON *Physiologus*, see "Physiologus i to islandske bearbejdelser" *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 4 (1889), ed. V. Dahlerup, p. 280.

⁹⁰For more information on the asp, see L. Wehrhahn-Stauch: "Aspis." *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 1 (Freiburg—Basel—Vienna, 1968), cols. 191-193.

⁹¹Trans. from *Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 87⁷⁷-82.

be understood as a warning given to him by God about the grave danger of his pride. His pride seems in fact bound up with his lack of prudential foresight, for he impiously mocks the warning instead of prudently recalling the words of the cathedral's patron represented above the doorway (I Peter 5: 8) "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walks about, seeking whom he may devour."⁹²

These speculations concerning Johannes Anglicus' pride seem to be confirmed when one recalls Alpha's employment of the Benedictine ladder of humility in *Jóns þátttr*, the "ladder which appeared to Jakob in his dream whereon he saw angels ascending and descending. This ascending and descending doubtless signify nothing else than an ascent by humility and a descent by pride." Being Jón's namesake, Johannes Anglicus' sudden drop to the floor is juxtaposed to Jón's ascent by humility, already implied in the tale from Paris, where Jón begins his ascent, and more clearly portrayed in his vision that follows the tale from Bologna. The word *Anglicus* makes this association with the ladder quite plausible, for Jón's dead friend aptly exemplifies those angels who descend by their pride.

The name of Johannes Anglicus fits in fact so neatly with the image of the ladder in *Jóns þátttr* that one wonders whether *Anglicus* is not a alteration made by Alpha of *Anguis*, a word that seems more appropriate when one thinks of the tale's attachment to the portal instead of its place within the *þátttr*. The bestiary quoted above says of this kin of creatures, that "Anguis [. . .] is the origin of all serpents, because they can be folded and bent, and hence snakes are called

⁹²For this citation in an ON bestiary see p. 266 in "Physiologus i to islandske bearbejdelser."

anguis' since they are angular and never straight."⁹³ This is reminiscent of the symbolism of the contorted column the young man in the portal carries on his shoulders, and indeed, the theme of the ineluctable but dubious passage of time is closely associated with the figure of the snake, as can be seen from this passage from the same bestiary:

Believe it, snakes have three odd things about them. The first odd thing is that when they are getting old their eyes grow blind, and if they want to renovate themselves they go away somewhere and fast for a long time until their skins are loose. Then they look for a tight crack in the rocks, and go in, and lay aside the old skin by scraping it off. Thus we, through much tribulation and abstinence for the sake of Christ, put off the old man and his garment. In this way we may seek the spiritual Rock, Jesus, and the tight crack, i.e. the Strait Gate.

The second odd thing about a snake is that when it goes to the river to drink water, it does not take its poison with it, but spews it into a hole. Thus we, when we come to get the living water and, drawing upon the eternal, come to hear the heavenly word in Church, we also ought to cast the poison out of ourselves, i.e. bad and earthly longings.

The third odd thing is that if a snake sees a naked man, it is afraid of him, but if it sees him with his clothes on, it springs upon him. We can understand the spiritual sense of this if we reflect that when the first man Adam was naked in Paradise, the Serpent was not able to spring upon him. But after he was dressed in the mortality of the body, the Serpent did spring. Just so, if you are wearing the mortal garment, i.e. the old man, and if you are long-standingly of evil days, the Serpent will pounce on you. But if you rid yourself from the garb worn by the Principalities and Powers of Darkness in this generation, then the Serpent will not be able to pounce, i.e. the Devil.⁹⁴

Similar thoughts about the renouncement of the old man may help explain the role of Jón's "usual adage". It does not appear elsewhere

⁹³*The Book of Beasts*, p. 165 (trans. from fol. 46a).

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 187-188 (trans. from fols. 52a-53a).

in Icelandic literature of the Middle Ages, but it is quite well known from the following anecdote current in the oral tradition of the nineteenth century:

Once a woman woke up in her bed beside her husband crying loudly. The man tried to comfort her and asked what was the matter. The woman said that she had had a terribly bad dream [*ógnarlega ljótan draum*]. "What did you dream, my creature [*skepnan mín*]?" said the man. "Don't mention it," said the woman and began to weep; "I dreamt that God was going to take me to heaven." Then said the man: "Don't let it bother you, bad dreams often forebode trifles [*oft er ljótur draumur fyrir litlu efni*]."95

Although the proverb sounds apotropaic and might originally have been used in response to bad dreams, its ironic use in this anecdote indicates that Johannes Nordmannus thought little of his friend's fate. It is almost certainly a late addition to Jón's variant, but instead of merely constituting a preposterous joke (that it is in fact a trifle that a lion tear Johannes Anglicus' right hand off), it may be taken as Alpha's way of illustrating Jón's self-abnegation, his renouncement of human pride embodied in his namesake, who can in this sense be seen as Jón's double in the tale, to be contrasted to his humble side in the light of the symbolism surrounding the ladder, but perhaps more originally in the light of the snake sloughing off the old garment and man's corresponding renouncement of the old man.

One church Manaresi should have mentioned in his study is the cathedral of Verona, in the west front of which there feature many

⁹⁵Trans. from J. Árnason: *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík, 1961), eds. Á. Böðvarsson and B. Vilhjálmsson, p. 496. Another variant (where two women sleep in the same bed and one dreams she goes to heaven and the other responds with this proverb) is found on p. 362 in vol. 5 of the same collection.

elements identical to the *porta de leoni* built almost a century later on the south side of San Pietro in Bologna.⁹⁶ Curiously, it was in the library of this very cathedral that Petrarch made in 1345 his greatest philological find, the collection of Cicero's *Epistolae ad Atticum* along with some letters to Quintus and to Brutus, a fortunate discovery that appears, however, to have made him forget to finish the ambitious *Rerum memorandarum libri* he was working on at the time.⁹⁷

Now there are strong ties between Petrarch's 'Books on Memorable Matters' and the ancient art of memory.⁹⁸ The most important exponent of this art was considered to be Cicero because of his discussion of it in *De inventione* (*Rhetorica prima* or *vetus*) and its prominent place in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (*Rhetorica secunda*), a work traditionally ascribed to him in the Middle Ages.⁹⁹ This art was in the thirteenth century revived and incorporated into the scholastic method by Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and a number of other Dominicans, who applied it in an unprecedented way to Christian ethics because they firmly believed memory to be a part of the cardinal virtue of Prudence.¹⁰⁰ This employment of artificial memory was appreciated as an important aid to preachers, and the treatises on it constantly encourage the use of imaginary as well as

⁹⁶See the picture on p. 335 in the *History of Art* (London, 1985), eds. G. S. Myers and T. Copplestone. It is strikingly akin to the *porta dei leoni* drawn according to Manaresi's research and reproduced in his article. Unfortunately, I have not been able to study the literature on the cathedral in Verona and its forerunners with respect to the porch, for instance in the cathedral of Modena, Ferrara and in the church of San Zeno also in Verona.

⁹⁷On this find, see Wilkins: *Life of Petrarch*, p. 51.

⁹⁸Cf. F. A. Yates: *The Art of Memory* (Chicago and London, 1966), pp. 101-104.

⁹⁹On these and other ancient works dealing with the art of memory, see *ibid.*, pp. 1-49.

¹⁰⁰Concerning the medieval revival of the art, see *ibid.*, pp. 50-128.

real *loci* as memory places. The structure of Petrarch's *Rerum* is an example of this method and in the case of Jón's tale from Bologna, it may be postulated that the presence of the zodiac, intercolumnal space, an elaborately decorated arch, memory for words such as *Anglicus* (reminding the preacher possibly of *anguis* or *angelicus*) and *Nordmannus* (reminiscent of *manus*), and of the employment of familiar and notable figures (in this case Bishop Jón Halldórsson) are all representative of the devices typical of the medieval art of memory.

The chief exercise of prudential memory among preachers concerned the remembrance of Paradise and Hell, of the paths of virtues and vices that lead to either place. This theme features in Alpha's prologue in 624 and he evidently used the Benedictine ladder of humility as such a device in *Jóns þáttr*. But according to Albert the Great, who commenced his studies in the Dominican house at Bologna the same year as the *porta dei leoni* was completed in the city's cathedral, memory places should ideally not only be real, but also to be had in 'solemn and rare' buildings.¹⁰¹ The impressive *porta dei leoni* in San Pietro would be the perfect site for such prudent use of memory, and this is what Jón Halldórsson the Preacher seems to have realized, using this memorable place to remind himself and his audience of how to avoid Hell with prudent *providentia*. Alpha in turn appears to have later employed similar methods in memory of Jón Halldórsson.

¹⁰¹Cf. Yates: *The Art of Memory*, p. 60-63.

Chapter three

Predicant sanctity and the sermon at Staðarhóll

After the description of Jón's vision of ascent on the scale of humility, portraying how Jón's celebrated sermons gave rise to his sanctity, there was occasion to pause in the account of the saint's departure and present some illustration of his preaching art. This example was not taken without deliberation. As the sequel to such explicit claims about Jón's posthumous place in heaven, which some readers could well have deemed audacious, it enforced this lofty appraisal by attaching the Preacher to the communion of saints. Very few of its members could bind him better to that heavenly body than Bishop Þorlákr of Skálholt (1133-1193), the illustrious saint who once occupied the very same seat as Jón. A momentous dream described in Þorlákr's *vita* illustrates the importance of this figure when the merits of any successor were at issue. Jón's vision of himself on top of the Preacher's church in Bergen is not dissimilar, and it may indeed be so by design:

Gissur Hallsson had a remarkable dream shortly after Bishop Þorlákr's death. He thought he went outdoors and saw Bishop Þorlákr sit on top of the church in Skálholt in his episcopal vestments and bless the people thence. He himself interpreted the dream so: that blessed Bishop Þorlákr would still be henceforth the head of his Christianity and of the church he had once sat in and hold an outstretched arm over his subjects.¹⁰²

¹⁰²Trans. from *Byskupa sögur* (*Editiones Arnemagnæanæ*, Series A, vol. 13, pt. 2, Copenhagen, 1978), ed. J. Helgason, p. 289¹⁻⁷. A shorter version of this dream of the chieftain can be found on p. 225⁴⁰⁻⁴⁴. Both versions are preserved in MSS from about 1350.

Retrospectively then, these two aspects of Jón's saintly image—his holy episcopal office and his predicant sanctity—would artfully converge in a sermon given by Jón when he was bishop of Skálholt and it was St Þorlákr's feast day. After the enthusiastic interpretation of Jón's dream about his sermon and ascent out of the priory church in Bergen, Alpha continues:

We shall now relate a tale [*eitt æventýr*] he himself gave in his sermon—when he was bishop *Skalholtensis*, on Þorlákr's feast in the summer and at the farmstead called Staðarhóll in the west quarter—and [i.e. relate] how just the blessed Þorlákr was and zealous in observing God's law [*hversu rættlátr hinn sæli Þorlákr var ok vandlátr at geyma guðs lög*]. He set forth this chosen example [*tiltekit dæmi*] such as it is here stands [written].¹⁰³

Here the interpolative voice disappears. Nothing more is said in *Jóns þáttur* about this memorable event or of the tale's application and these authorial comments should thus be considered with care. The tale used by Jón in the church at Staðarhóll is by far the longest one in *Jóns þáttur*. It occupies over a third of the *þáttur* in AM 657 4to and nearly half of text in AM 624 4to, where it forms in fact the last chapter of *Jóns þáttur* since the description of Jón's death in 657 is discarded.¹⁰⁴ The tale in question begins as follows:

A very mighty nobleman resided in a certain town. He held no higher rank than that of a knight, but due to his kin and governance he had authority over many men who held the same title as he. This lord was so very righteous and wise in his rule—as

¹⁰³Trans. from *Íslendzk æventýri*, vol. 1, p. 88¹²⁵⁻³⁰.

¹⁰⁴In Gering's ed. of *Jóns þáttur*, AM 657 a-b and AM 1010 occupy about 296 lines, but AM 624 ends after 247. Including the prefatory remarks, the tale of the just noble covers 122 lines (i.e. 125-247) in Gering's ed. of these MSS.

this story will prove [*sem lýsaz mun í sögunni*]¹⁰⁵—that he always respected the facts of a case and gave no heed to bribery or discrimination, whosoever was involved, a close kinsman or one unrelated. In his residence and at his table there was a young man, the son of his sister by kinship, who served him daily along with other courteous men who were both many and of noble descent. This place was very wealthy and populous and there was a bishop in the town.¹⁰⁵

There is not room to give an exact translation of the remainder of this tale, but it runs roughly as follows. The mighty noble became very ill and lay in bed. One day he heard a dreadful noise from the next chamber. After forcing his household to inform him of its cause, the lord learned that his aforementioned kinsman had raped a woman. He thereupon commanded him who was his judicial deputy during the illness to execute the nephew at once. But the subordinates could not bear to behead a man of such noble descent and so promising in leadership. They therefore kept the nephew secretly in the noble's house and hoped that their bedridden lord would not discover their disobedience before he died of his illness. The nephew, however, became bolder day by day until finally, he chose to pay his uncle a visit. Trusting his wrath had subsided, the nephew entered the chamber, and the noble welcomed him with a smile. The young man therefore approached the bed expecting a kiss of peace, but instead, the noble dug a carving-knife into his throat and killed the nephew with his very own hands.

Shortly thereafter, when the noble was about to die, the bishop in the town was sent for to perform the last rites. But upon hearing the noble's confession, the bishop was shocked that he did not mention the killing of his nephew and the bishop therefore charged him with this

¹⁰⁵Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 88¹³¹⁻¹⁴¹.

act. The noble, however, then smiled and declared in a low voice but very firmly that if the bishop called this deed a crime, he would summon God himself to judge in this matter instead of the bishop. Enraged, the bishop prepared to depart without giving absolution and administering the *viaticum*. The noble then asked that he at least be allowed to see Christ's body before he died, and because this last request filled everyone with great sorrow, the bishop was persuaded to do as the dying man bade. But when he opened the pyx there was no host to be seen, for it had miraculously vanished from the bishop's vessel and placed itself on the nobleman's tongue, who opened his mouth for all to see. The astonished bishop thereupon begged for God's mercy and the noble's forgiveness and performed the last rites and burial with great honour in view of God's judgement in this matter.

This is the third and final tale attributed to Jón Halldórsson in *Jóns þáttir*. Like the stories from his student days abroad, it too is introduced as an *ævintýr*. But unlike the *ævintýr* from Paris and Bologna, this one is simultaneously called a *dæmi*. This additional term defines more closely the nature of the narrative, or rather how the present *ævintýr* is to be read, indicating that some kind of exemplification is involved. Indeed, the prefatory suggestion that at least two levels of meaning are intended is reiterated at the very end of the tale with the words: "Endar nú þar þessa *dæmisögu*."¹⁰⁶ But despite these terms that circumscribe the *ævintýr* from Jón's sermon and encourage so clearly its allegorical interpretation, there follows no explication whatsoever of how it could actually serve as a *dæmi* or

¹⁰⁶"Here ends this exemplary tale." Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 88¹²⁸⁻¹²⁹.

dæmisaga to develop the theme of "how just the blessed Þorlákr was and zealous in observing God's law."

This recondite application of the tale suggests that Alpha took familiarity with St Þorlákr for granted. Such an assumption is not at all strange in an ecclesiastical text from fourteenth-century Iceland. In most other places the twentieth of July belonged to St Margaret of Antioch, but in Iceland the *translatio* of Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson's relics had long before taken precedence over the virgin's martyrdom and become one of the greatest feasts of the year.¹⁰⁷ The bishop was thus a holy figure familiar to everyone in Iceland at the time of Jón's sermon, and he was of course well known to the officiating clergy, the most likely readership of Alpha's *exempla*. Also to be borne in mind, when speculating why Alpha was not more informative about this exemplary use of the tale, is his general inobtrusiveness regarding the significance of his tales, in view of which this particular reticence should come as no surprise. The brief introduction in Alpha's own person that prefaces the tale of the just noble should rather, in such straightforward collections, be taken as all the more momentous and intriguing.

Yet the implied allegory may not merely seem somewhat enigmatic, for it must appear irritatingly abstruse, if not blatantly incompatible with the prefatory comment quoted above, to those readers who note that Jón told his story on the feast day of a bishop

¹⁰⁷For information on St Margaret's feast day and cult in medieval Iceland see Á. Björnsson: *Sagadaganna* (Reykjavík, 1993), pp. 182-186 and M. Cormack: *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400* (= *Subsidia hagiographica*, vol. 78, Brussels, 1994), pp. 121-122. Due to the Translation of Þorlákr, which took place in 1198 and became a Holy Day of Obligation in 1237, Margaret was accorded another day as well in Iceland, the thirteenth of July. Þorlákr's feast days and cult will be discussed later.

and thus conjecturally associate the bishop in the tale with St Þorlákr. Ignorance concerning the saint could of course make anyone susceptible to this association, finding at first glance no other element in the tale linking it to Þorlákr, and obviously, this line of thought can easily come about today. It may be well, therefore, to study the tale more closely and note the difficulties this identification presents to the reader of *Jóns pátttr.* How can one possibly accept that the bishop in it is *réttlátr* and *sæll* like Bishop Þorlákr? This is perhaps the most conspicuous problem modern readers will encounter when studying *Jóns pátttr.*

In the first place, the noble is unmistakably the central figure of the tale. His great suffering is described with sympathy and his renowned justice is spoken of in the most laudatory terms. Whereas the noble is thus presented from the outset as the hero, the bishop is clearly a secondary character who only appears in the latter half of the tale. Indeed, considering how the narrative falls neatly into two separate parts, each having its own carefully prepared climax, it may even be said that the bishop replaces the executed nephew in this capacity as the character dramatically juxtaposed to the hero. The bishop's arrogance and noisy fulmination against the noble stands from this viewpoint in sharp contrast to the latter's quiet humility and intransigent equity. But far more distressing than these features of the tale—for anyone associating St Þorlákr with the bishop—is the bishop's lamented denial of the *viaticum*, for this reaction is proven horribly wrong by God's own intervention in the miracle of the host.

This divine demonstration of the bishop's capital error of judgement renders him hardly illustrative of the exemplary justice of

a saintly bishop. It is, on the contrary, hard to imagine more unequivocal and opprobrious proof of the injustice of a man in this office. In fact, the bishop is obviously one of those custodians of the Sacrament who in medieval legend are deemed in disgrace with God and proven so by God's withdrawal, by the host, this symbol of the sacerdotal office, escaping from the unworthy administrator who finds the paten and chalice empty.¹⁰⁸ Hence the bishop's reaction to the host's weird disappearance from the pyx:

The bishop was stricken with great fear because of this, as was everyone else who knew just as well as he did that they had placed the *oblationem* into the vessel before they left the church. And when the mighty noble saw their surprise he asked: 'What fear has come over you?', he said, 'or what are you saying'? The bishop answered and said that the sacrifice had gone out of its covering. The mighty noble then said: 'If it is not there, then perhaps with God's will it is here.' And when everyone looked towards him, he opened up his mouth and presented before everyone's eyes the sacrifice white and pure lying on his tongue. The bishop fell forth and begged for God's mercy and the mighty noble's forgiveness for this misunderstanding contrary to God's judgement. He then with tearful devotion ministered to that good man [*þeim góða manni*]. The mighty noble died from the illness and was buried with all the more honour and everyone's devotion the better it was known how God himself deemed his steadfastness and righteousness. Here ends this exemplary tale.¹⁰⁹

The bishop incurs this terrifying token because he is the proponent of a "rangan skilning móti guðs dómi."¹¹⁰ In this he assumes a role reminiscent of yet another character prominent in many eucharistic miracles, namely that of the doubter, who is in fact sometimes an

¹⁰⁸For this widespread motif cf. J. A. MacCulloch: *Medieval Faith and Fable* (London, 1932), pp. 160-161 and M. Rubin: *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 108-129.

¹⁰⁹Trans. from *Íslendzk æventýri*, vol. 1, p. 92²³¹⁻²⁴⁷.

¹¹⁰"misunderstanding contrary to God's judgement." Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 92²⁴².

officiating priest.¹¹¹ As these counterparts of his, doubting Jews, heretics and officiating priests lacking faith, the bishop inadvertently prepares with his error the groundwork for a eucharistic miracle. But he does not bring this upon himself due to his attitude or behaviour towards the eucharist itself, and the miracle at the noble's deathbed is not simply yet another sign proving Christ's presence in the host and the awesome power of the eucharist. For besides the erroneous bishop there is the other and more central character in Jón's tale and the Sacrament is principally the means by which a divine judgement is revealed about this man's righteousness. Much like a method of ordeal, the eucharist serves to show "hvern veg guði sjálfum hefir virz hans einörð ok rættvísi."¹¹²

It is the bishop's error regarding the hero's righteousness, and no doubt of the eucharistic presence, that prompts the noble's request for a judgement of God and the subsequent withdrawal of the host and its reappearance on his tongue. Again, like his numerous counterparts in eucharistic miracle-tales, the bishop is transformed from being an arrogant doubter to being a shamefaced witness when confronted with the miracle. The mighty noble, however, enters into the company of those who are especially favoured by God and receive the Sacrament as a token of this directly from the hands of a saint, angel or even Christ himself.¹¹³ The two are thus dramatically juxtaposed in their relation to Christ by virtue of his body. When the host escapes from the bishop and places itself on the noble's tongue, Christ himself

¹¹¹Cf. M. Rubin: *Corpus Christi*, pp. 108-129.

¹¹²"how God himself deemed his steadfastness and righteousness." Trans. from *Islendzk æventýri*, vol. 1, p. 92²⁴⁵⁻⁶.

¹¹³Cf. J. A. MacCulloch: *Medieval Faith and Fable*, pp. 156 and 162.

triumphantly vindicates the noble: "where I am, there shall also my servant be" (John 12: 26)—demonstrating that in the bishop's misjudgement of the noble and by denying him communion with his lord, the Judge himself had been misjudged and denied communion with his servant.

The host's withdrawal clearly shows the bishop to be neither just nor saintly. Its reappearance compels the reader instead to see the mighty noble as the one exemplifying Þorlákr's saintly justice. It is the noble, and not the bishop, who is truly "zealous in observing God's law" and rewarded for his righteousness with a vindicative miracle. His miraculous reception of the host, this ultimate symbol of man's communion with Christ, shows him indeed to have been not merely just, but even saintly in his justice. So although he is not a bishop like Þorlákr, the noble nevertheless shares the two attributes of the saint mentioned in the preface to the tale, for Þorlákr was a man *réttlátr* and *sæll*. The just noble is in fact so redolent with this saintly virtue of justice, that a preacher relating this eucharistic miracle in his sermon must have been tempted to quote the Beatitudes (Mat. 5: 6): "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

Jón and Alpha must surely, then, have identified St Þorlákr with the just noble and not the pig-headed prelate or slain molester. The reasons why they did not simply change the bishop in the tale into an ordinary priest, and thereby preclude the grave misunderstanding that he in some way exemplified Bishop Þorlákr, will be explained later. Our interpretation of the tale should however indicate how appropriate its pronounced notion of holy communion or

incorporation was both for the occasion of Bishop Jón's use of it at Staðarhóll and for Alpha's own employment of it in his piece on Jón Halldórsson. The scene of the joyful burial of the just noble is a very apt image on the day commemorating the *translatio* of a saint's body, the presence that made Þorlákr the patron of the place where his relics reposed, and we have already seen that the noble is *réttlátr* and *sæll* like the saint he is meant to exemplify. With regard to Jón, however, the vindication of the just noble may be seen to correspond to Alpha's description of how God ultimately vindicated Jón's preaching and tales, and the events of the tale may moreover be taken as an anticipation of Jón's final communion, saintly death and burial in Bergen described at the end of *Jóns þáttur*. This second point, it is true, does not apply to *Jóns þáttur* as it appears in 624, for Jón's death is not described there, but the omission of Jón's deathbed in Bergen accentuates all the more the aforesaid correspondence between God's vindication of the noble and the posthumous vindication of the Preacher. The saintly figures involved, the just noble, Þorlákr and Jón, seem thus to be aligned in an almost iconographic fashion, and this perspective subtly invokes the corporate image of the communion of saints.

The necessity of identifying the noble with St Þorlákr is further confirmed by other versions of the tale. He is in all of them the quintessence of justice, a just man who, after being misjudged by an officiating priest or bishop, is vindicated by a miracle of the host.

Gering noted that this same tale is also found in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum*,¹¹⁴ a work written in Cologne

¹¹⁴*Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 2, p. 77.

about one century before Jón gave his sermon at Staðarhóll. There the hero is named Erkenbaldus de Burban and he is said to have been a "vir nobilis et potens, erat tantus amator iustitiae, ut nullam in iudiciis respiceret personam."¹¹⁵

But although the tale makes its earliest literary appearance in the *Dialogue* and this collection was very popular at the time, Jón (which we can for convenience's sake regard as representing Alpha as well in the present context) need not have acquired it from there. In the first place, variants collected in the nineteenth century from oral tradition in Belgium show that one cannot rule out completely that Jón simply heard the tale at some point, for instance in a sermon.¹¹⁶ Jón's version does indeed differ from Caesarius' considerably, although it must be taken into account that many manuscripts of the *Dialogue* remain unedited.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵*Dialogus miraculorum*, vol. 2 (Cologne—Bonn—Brussels, 1851) ed. J. Strange, p. 193. In trans.: "a powerful noble, [who] was so great a lover of justice that he had no respects of persons in the sentences he pronounced." *The Dialogue on Miracles*, vol. 2 (London, 1929), trans. by H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, p. 140.

¹¹⁶For these more recent versions see L. Hibbard: "Erkenbald the Belgian: A Study in Medieval Exempla of Justice." *Modern Philology* 17 (1920), pp. 669-670 and 672. It is significant that Hibbard was unaware of Jón's version when she wrote this paper. Had she known of Gering's ed. she would also have learned that the tale appears in Johannes Pauli's *Schimpf und Ernst* of the early 16th century. See no. 129 in J. Pauli: *Schimpf und Ernst*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1924), ed. J. Bolte, p. 87 and notes in vol. 2, p. 292. Although she apparently tried to assemble every variant extant (and Jón's is quite important, for it is among the oldest and quite unique), this omission is insignificant to her main thesis, viz. that the connection of the name *Erkenbald* to this tale can serve to explain why the legend in the ME poem *St. Erkenwald* became attached to the saint of London. Further variants of this tale are listed by Tubach in *Index exemplorum*, no. 2659. See also Thompson: *Motif-Index*: "V32. Host miraculously given when it is refused a man by the priest."

¹¹⁷For unedited MSS of the *Dialogue* from the 13th and 14th century see J. A. Herbert: *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. 3 (London, 1910), pp. 363, 367 and 613. The version given in British Library Add. 18364, fol. 41r. is in an anonymous 14th-century collection of *exempla* which in this case seems indebted to the *Dialogue*. See L. Hibbard: "Erkenbald the Belgian," pp. 671-672.

Caesarius seems to have regarded the tale in question as primarily one that concerned the eucharist, seeing as he placed it in the ninth book of the *Dialogue*, one of the best known collections of eucharistic tales in the Middle Ages. Jón's version differs in this respect from Caesarius, and he may in fact have drawn upon some other written source, for the tale soon entered other collections of *exempla*. The oldest of these, the *Bonum universale de apibus* by the Dominican Thomas Cantimprensis (Cantimpré) and dating to about 1256-1261, contains a version so dissimilar to Jón's that it need not be considered as a possible source.¹¹⁸ The third oldest variant appears in the *Alphabetum narrationum* around 1308, a popular compilation now attributed to the Dominican Arnoldus de Leodio (Liège), in which the tales are presented in alphabetical order.¹¹⁹ Jón's tale occurs there, quite significantly, under the topic *Justicia* and the noble is specifically said to be a judge.¹²⁰ He is a judge as well in an

¹¹⁸See the text reproduced in A. M. Cetto: *Der Berner Trajan- und Herkinbald-Teppich* (Bern, 1966), p. 205. The dying count kills his son in this version by stabbing him in the heart and it is an abbot who denies him Communion. Cetto's study of this legend (on pp. 134-141) has limitations, primarily because the author does not know Hibbard's study of this tale nor Jón Halldórsson's version.

¹¹⁹J. A. Herbert proposed this date and authorship to replace a most unlikely attribution. See his "The Authorship of the Alphabetum Narrationum." *The Library* 6 (1905), pp. 94-101 and *Catalogue of Romances*, pp. 423-430.

¹²⁰This work was trans. into ME early in the 15th century. The bishop is there named Herkenwaldus, but the "noble man and myghty" is called Bormar and he is said to be a "Iustis". See *An Alphabet of Tales: An English 15th Century Translation of the Alphabetum narrationum once attributed to Étienne de Besançon*, (=Early English Text Society, Original Series, vol. 127, pt. 2, London, 1905), ed. M. M. Banks, vol. 2, pp. 287-289. Unfortunately, this Eng. version remains the only one of the *Alphabetum* edited. The justice's name is here clearly derived from a misunderstanding of the Eng. translator. His exemplar usually introduces a tale by naming the author or work from which it is taken. This led the translator to think that "Herkenwaldus" was the author, and "Bormar" the judge ("Herkenwaldus tellis of ane þat hight Bormar, þat was a noble man"). Obviously the tale has begun something like "Herkenwaldus de Bormar, vir nobilis et potens . . ." Since it is said at the end of the tale that the bishop went about preaching about this miracle of the Host, the translator was able to cover up his initial mistake by keeping Herkenwaldus as the name of the bishop and identifying this bishop with the source

anonymous collection from the Dominican priory in Breslau written about 1350,¹²¹ and this is also the case in a work dating from the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Herolt, a Dominican prior in Nuremberg.¹²² Finally, the same is true of the slightly older compilation from England named *Jakob's Well*, where the legend is appended to a brief discussion of equity and wrath; the just noble is presented as an example of the former and the bishop taken as an instance of the latter.¹²³ However, not even in this last case, where the legend is seen more clearly in the context of a sermon than in the other works listed above, is the tale of the just noble employed in a way remotely similar to Jón's more specific usage in the sermon at Staðarhóll.

Much importance need not be attached to the Dominican role in the writing of these repertories since most medieval preaching aids emanated from this order. Although it is likely that Jón used a source connected with his order, it is impossible to identify the direct source used by him or Alpha before there has been carried out a thorough search and detailed comparison of all the known medieval variants of the tale. For the present, however, the main point to be made is this: Bishop Jón and many others at the time considered the tale to deal

for the tale. On similar mistakes by the translator cf. Herbert: "The Authorship of *Alphabetum Narrationum*," p. 97.

¹²¹See *Erzählungen des Mittelalters in deutscher Übersetzung und lateinische Urtext (Wort und Brauch*, vol. 12, Breslau, 1914), ed. J. Klapper, no. 134, pp. 136-137 (Ger.) and 336-337 (Lat.). The judge's name is here Reynoldus; he kills his only son and the host glides into his mouth. "Reynoldus" must be some sort of corruption of Erkinwald.

¹²²Published in Nuremberg 1486 under the title *Sermones discipuli de tempore et de sanctis cum promptuario exemplorum et de miraculis beatae Mariae virginis*. See Hibbard: "Erkenbald the Belgian," p. 672.

¹²³*Jakob's Well: An English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man's Conscience* (=Early English Text Society, vol. 115, London, 1900), ed. A. Brandies, pp. 89-97.

primarily with justice, or more precisely, with the exemplary justice of a venerable noble in his capacity as a judge. Apart from perhaps in the oldest version in Caesarius' *Dialogue*,¹²⁴ the eucharistic miracle is a secondary element in relation to this main theme, for the host is primarily the *means by which* the truth about the noble's justice is revealed to his fellow men. The fact that this view of the tale gained predominance is also borne out by pictorial evidence. It became the topic of Roger van der Weyden's celebrated painting in the town hall of Brussels from around 1440 called the *Justice of Trajan and the Justice Herkinbald*. His work is only preserved in a tapestry woven not long after the painting's execution, and it shows the tale of the just noble set beside that of how the pagan but just Emperor Trajan was posthumously saved through the prayers of Pope Gregory the Great.¹²⁵

But the foregoing suggestions as to how medieval people generally viewed the story and its hero still leave unexplained why Jón selected this particular tale to illustrate the justice of St Þorlákr. To understand this, one can only search in the life and posthumous cult of the Icelandic saint.

Jón's saintly predecessor in Skálholt, Þorlákr Þórhallsson, was the first Icelandic bishop to contest the private ownership of churches in his diocese, an 'abuse' from which chieftains and influential farmers drew their wealth and power, but at the same time prevented the Icelandic Church from becoming a fully fledged institution. He was a

¹²⁴For the tale's place among *exempla* describing miracles of the host cf. Rubin: *Corpus Christi*, p. 119.

¹²⁵On this tapestry, see Cetto's monograph: *Der Berner Traian und Herkinbald-Teppich*.

reformer in other areas as well, such as in the establishment of a separate and independent ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the banning of lay leaders from the priesthood, penitential discipline and the sanctity of marriage.¹²⁶

During his episcopate, Bishop Þorlákr had limited success in this Gregorian endeavour. He was though officially recognized as a saint shortly after his death in 1193, but curiously, this was not meant, at least manifestly, to further his radical plans for Church reform. Secular leaders elected in 1194 one of their own to be bishop of Skálholt, the bastard *goði* Páll Jónsson (bishop 1195-1211). It was this reactionary successor of Þorlákr who in 1198, after many miracles had been reported, consented to Þorlákr being invoked at the secular *alþingi* (the annual national assembly) and had his relics translated into the cathedral of Skálholt. Þorlákr's *vita*, *Þorláks saga*, was composed during Páll's episcopate. There is no mention made in it of the saint's notorious dealings with secular leaders—omitting thereby a prominent political struggle of the twelfth century in Iceland.¹²⁷

Þorlákr quickly became one the most venerated saints in Iceland. But aside from his lively cult with its multitude of posthumous

¹²⁶For information on Þorlákr's reforms see J. Helgason: *Íslands Kirke*, pp. 101-114; J. Jóhannesson: *Íslendinga saga*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík, 1956), pp. 212-236; A. O. Johnsen: "Torlak Torhallson." *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, vol. 16 (Oslo, 1969), pp. 532-536; J. Benediktsson: "Þorlákr helgi Þórhallsson." *KLNM*, vol. 20 (Copenhagen, 1976), cols. 385-388; S. Rafnsson: "The Penitential of St. Þorlákr in its Icelandic Context." *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law* 15 (1985), pp. 19-30; J. L. Byock: *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas and Power* (Berkeley—Los Angeles—London, 1988), pp. 154-164.

¹²⁷This older version (the so-called A-version) is ed. by J. Helgason in *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, pp. 177-240. For an Eng. trans. see *Stories of the Bishops of Iceland* (London, 1895), trans. by D. Leith, pp. 79-113 and *Origines Islandicae*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1905), ed. and trans. by G. Vigfússon and F. Y. Powell, pp. 458-502. These trans. are not used directly here, but they have been consulted.

miracles,¹²⁸ he was to be remembered chiefly for his controversial ecclesiastical reforms. This hitherto unpopular aspect of Bishop Þorlákr was many years later revived—if not actually overstated—and incorporated into his saintly image. This took place about the same time as Þorlákr's struggle was resumed with far greater success by Árni Þorláksson (bishop in 1269-1298), the second advocate of reform in Skálholt, who presented the predecessor enshrined in the cathedral as his example, both excommunicating and absolving his opponents on the Day of St Þorlákr.¹²⁹ Many of the saint's and Árni's reforms became definitive with the institution of the latter's code of canon law, *Kristinn réttr nýi* ("The New Christian Law"), in the diocese of Skálholt in 1275.¹³⁰ In *Arnbælisbók*, an impressive manuscript from about 1350 and containing Árni's code, there is a colourful drawing of St Þorlákr. He sits enthroned with his haloed but severe face turned towards the first chapter, holding a staff in his left hand whereas his right is outstretched so as to give this constitution of new order his authoritative blessing.¹³¹ This code was not accepted in

¹²⁸At least fifty-six Icelandic churches were dedicated to Þorlákr in medieval times. Only St Mary (200 churches), St Peter (73) and St Olaf (72) received more dedications. See G. Jónsson: *Dómkirkjan á Hólum í Hjaltadal* (Reykjavík, 1919), p. 56. But in view of the fact that Þorlákr became a saint almost two centuries after the conversion of Iceland and was thus a latecomer compared to the other three saints, he must have been more popular than these numbers imply at first sight. Collections of Þorlákr's posthumous miracles are ed. by J. Helgason in *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2. The miracles are close to two hundred and they occur from around Þorlákr's death up to the year 1325 at least (a number have been torn away in the MS), i.e. into the first years of Jón Halldórsson's episcopate.

¹²⁹See *Árna saga biskups* (= *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi*, vol. 2, Reykjavík, 1972), ed. P. Hauksson, pp. 162-4, 663-6 and 1553-6. For an account in Eng. of bishop Árni's reforms, see E. Ó. Sveinsson: *The Age of the Sturlungs: Icelandic Civilization in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. by J. S. Hannesson (= *Islandica*, vol. 36, Ithaca, New York, 1953), pp. 141-149.

¹³⁰*Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, vol. 5 (Christiania [Oslo], 1895), ed. G. Storm and E. Hertzberg, pp. 16-56.

¹³¹On this drawing, see S. Jónsdóttir: "Biskupsmynd í Arnbælisbók." *Skírnir* 144

the northern diocese of Hólar until 1354.¹³²

The militant portrayal of St Þorlákr inevitably brought about a revision of *Þorláks saga*. In this new version of the saga the aforesaid omission of political strife is explicitly said to be mended in a self-assured and highly florid prologue:

We are inspired to write the life and miracles of this venerable lord and spiritual father because it seems to us that in the older presentation of the story he has hardly received a worthy remembrance for the trials and sufferings he endured at the hands of his adversaries who arose to the injury of the Church in his episcopate and of this matter we find less told than we would wish.¹³³

Instead of suppressing the saint's notorious efforts to reform, these Gregorian activities were now displayed as the true and principal basis for Þorlákr's sanctity.¹³⁴

The so-called *Oddaverja þáttur* is by far the longest interpolation of this second recension of *Þorláks saga*, or *Þorláks saga B*. It occupies about a third of the entire saga and deals rather histrionically with the controversies between Bishop Þorlákr and several chieftains over church estates and marital affairs.¹³⁵ Towards the middle of *Þorláks saga B* there is a special prologue to *Oddaverja þáttur* written in the same ornate style as the first prologue:

(1970), pp. 111-114.

¹³²*Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen, 1896), ed. J. Þorkelsson, pp. 98-99.

¹³³Trans. from *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 241²³-242²⁸.

¹³⁴Cf. J. Böðvarsson: "Munur eldri og yngri gerðar Þorláks sögu." *Saga* 6 (1968), pp. 81-94. J. Böðvarsson wishes to attribute this rewriting of the *Þorláks saga* to reformers in the time of Bishop Árni. The MS of the B version of the saga cannot however be much older than about 1350.

¹³⁵For an Eng. trans. of *Oddaverjaþáttur*, see *Origines Islandicae*, vol. 1, pp. 567-591 and *Stories of the Bishops of Iceland*, pp. 115-123.

And now since something has been told of the blessed behaviour of this saintly bishop as well as of his episcopal authority and holy humility, it is well suited that there next be heard the testimonies, along with the circumstances and events these enjoin, that prove how worthy Þorlákr was to hold the pastoral title and be counted eternally among those bishops who observed to their utmost the law of Almighty God [*hverfu makligr Þorlákur var at bera hirðilíf nafnit ok reiknaz eilífliga milli þeirra byskupa. er framm fylgdu laugum almáttugf guðs í fremsta megni*].¹³⁶

A reformist conception of Þorlákr's sanctity was thus established by the time Jón gave his sermon at Staðarhóll and *Þorláks saga B*, or some version similar to it, would presumably have been read on that particular day.¹³⁷ It is therefore not unlikely, given Jón's office, that he had this refashioned image of Þorlákr in mind on that occasion. His *tiltekið dæmi*, or chosen example, is indeed senseless if one merely reads *Þorláks saga A*. Furthermore, the introduction to the example in *Jóns þáttur*, it so happens, sounds very much like the purposeful prologue to *Oddaverja þáttur* quoted above.¹³⁸ The prefatory phrase "hversu réttlátr hinn sæli Þorlákr var ok vandlátr at geyma guðs lög"¹³⁹ in *Jóns þáttur* can be set beside "hverfu makligr Þorlákr var at bera hirðilíf nafnit ok reiknaz eilífliga milli þeirra

¹³⁶Trans. from *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 247¹-248⁹.

¹³⁷As well as the single MS of the B-version (ca. 1350), five MSS (one from ca. 1400) of the seven preserving the C-version (the two other ones, from ca. 1370 and 1370-1390, are fragmentary but must have had the *þáttur* as well) contain *Oddaverja þáttur*. The only medieval MS of the A-version (ca. 1350-1365) lacks the *þáttur*. Cf. P. Bibire: "Þorláks saga helga." *MSE*, p. 671. It is nevertheless likely that Jón knew *Oddaverjaþáttur*—whether in B, C or as a separate work—and that he would have thought of it, heard or read it on the feast day in question.

¹³⁸A literal trans. of the words "hversu réttlátr hinn sæli Þorlákr var ok vandlátr at geyma guðs lög" in *Jóns þáttur* would be "how just the blessed Þorlákr was and zealous in observing the law of God." But the term *guðs lög*, which means literally 'God's law', was the term for ecclesiastical or canon law in medieval Iceland. It would have been understood as such by anyone reading *Jóns þáttur* and this is the usage of the term in Jón Halldórsson's statutes. It can therefore be trans. as 'canon law' although this would make the resemblance between the prologue to *Oddaverja þáttur* and the introduction to Jón's story less clear in Eng. trans.

¹³⁹*Íslendzka æventýri*, vol. 1, p. 881²⁸-129.

byfkupa. er framm fylgdu laugum almáttugf guðf i fremsta megni”¹⁴⁰ in the prologue to *Oddaverja þátttr*. Surely, this clear correspondence warrants comparison of the events described in *Oddaverja þátttr* and the *exemplum* of *Jóns þátttr*. Besides the verbal echo between the two introductory phrases, the general intention seems to be identical.

This is not to say that the story of the just noble deals in any obvious way with the reform and law of the Church. It is rather a certain act of ecclesiastical justice that featured in Þorlákr's reforms as they are described in *Oddaverja þátttr* that comes to mind in this context. In the time of Þorlákr's episcopate an Icelandic bishop was very weak in means of coercion and the saint had therefore often to employ excommunication to carry out his campaign. This 'spiritual sword' was the only weapon Þorlákr had to wield against his opponents in *Oddaverja þátttr*, and he did so quite effectively if we are to believe its author; because of his frightful sentences some excommunicates gave in to the saint's demands and were absolved while those with a more hardened heart suffered dearly.¹⁴¹

When Jón gave his sermon at Staðarhóll the saintly Þorlákr had in other words become the bellicose reformer, and to preach in that period about Þorlákr's righteousness and zeal in observing God's law would in the first place have referred to his most memorable act of episcopal authority and discipline. In view of this state of affairs and the close resemblance between the prefatory comment to Jón's tale in *Jóns þátttr* and the prologue to *Oddaverja þátttr* in *Þorláks saga B* one

¹⁴⁰*Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 247⁴⁻⁶.

¹⁴¹See *ibid.*, pp. 258 and 262. *Oddaverjaþátttr* covers pp. 247-270 in this ed. and excommunications are, so to speak, referred to on every other page: pp. 249, 253, 255-257, 259-261, 263-264, 267-269.

might next wish to investigate how the excommunicating saint could possibly have brought to Jón's mind the tale of the harsh but just noble, and conversely, how this tale was to make Jón's audience think of the righteous Þorlákr.

Firstly, it may be well to recall that the sword was at that time a very common symbol for justice and within the Church it was the predominant symbol for excommunication.¹⁴² By such sentencing the excommunicate was 'cut off' from the body of Holy Church by exclusion from the sacraments, and if anathema were joined to it, he was banished from the company of all Christians and eternal salvation as well. There is no question that Bishop Jón was well acquainted with this symbolism and it should be noted that in another tale of Alpha preserved along with *Jóns þáttir* in 657 and 624 the excommunications of Pope Gregory VI are described in exactly these terms.¹⁴³

If we envision the noble's *tálguknífur*,¹⁴⁴ or carving-knife, serving as just such a metaphor in Jón's sermon, then a strategic array of congruent episodes and images from *Þorláks saga B* quickly becomes transparent. It is said there, for example, that

many men opposed Þorlákr greatly, although some did so more openly than others, because they deemed him harsh and cruel [*vírðu honum til harðleiks ok mífkunnarleyf*] towards people when he condemned the immorality and public sins of wicked men and subdued those with the authority and penalties of Holy Church [*valldi ok stríðu heilagrar kirkú*] who did not wish to make amends after his salutary

¹⁴²Cf. A. M. Stickler: "Il gladius nel Registro di Gregorio VII." *Studi gregoriani*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1948), pp. 89-103.

¹⁴³*Íslendzka æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 50¹²⁻²⁰. Elsewhere, Jón speaks of people "pierced with the lance of excommunication [*banns spíoti verði í gegnum þa skotit*]" See *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 2, p. 592¹³.

¹⁴⁴*Íslendzka æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 90¹⁸⁴.

admonitions.¹⁴⁵

Þorlákr was thus held to be cruel in his punishments like the righteous noble, whose underlings did not dare oppose him openly “þótt dómrinn þætti harður”.¹⁴⁶ And just as the noble on his deathbed was confident in having rightfully executed his nephew when the bishop charged him with cruel murder and denied him absolution along with the *viaticum*, so Bishop Þorlákr was reported to have confirmed his excommunications with vigour on his deathbed before receiving Extreme Unction:

Seven nights before he died, the bishop called together the clergy and had himself anointed. And before he received the unction he gave a very long speech although speech was slow and difficult to him: ‘When I lay in bed previously,’ he said, ‘with little might and received unction in that illness also, and when the chant was about to be performed as it is now, I ordered that all those people who were declared excommunicate by me should be free of my sentence if I passed away. I hoped this would bring them mercy and that I would not be condemned for it [*mer æigi til affallz doms*]. But I was rewarded in such a way by those who would not be redressed by me, that they said I could be seen to have gone too far in my sentences when I wished to mitigate them all after my death. But I will now put these reports to the test. You shall now hear my sentence and make it known that I wish all my sentences and pronounced excommunications to remain unaltered unless these people be reconciled with those whom I have ordered to carry out my case. And I forbid any absolution other than the one I have previously declared. Otherwise, they may wait for the bishop who succeeds me.’¹⁴⁷

This episode may in fact also recall the scene when the emboldened

¹⁴⁵Trans. from *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 261⁴⁶⁻⁵¹ (*Oddaverjapáttur*).

¹⁴⁶“although the judgement was thought harsh.” Trans. from *Íslendzk æventýri*, vol. 1, p. 90¹⁶⁵.

¹⁴⁷Trans. from *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, pp. 222²¹-223³² (A-version). Pp. 277-278 (B and C) closely resembles A here.

nephew who, assuming that his uncle regrets the harsh sentence and wishes to absolve him with a kiss of peace as he lies dying, is suddenly executed by the determined noble.¹⁴⁸

Yet another parallel worthy of note is the close relation of the just man to the person punished by him. The most famous dispute in *Oddaverja þáttur*, and hence its name,¹⁴⁹ was between Þorlákr and the greatest chieftain at the time, Jón Loptsson of Oddi, who was leader of the Oddaverjar. Þorlákr had been brought up and educated in Oddi by Jón Loptsson's uncle. He was moreover supported by the Oddaverjar in his election to the episcopate in 1174, and as bishop-elect he was escorted to Skálholt by Jón Loptsson.¹⁵⁰ In 1178, when Þorlákr returned to Iceland after being consecrated in Norway by Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson at Nidaros (Trondheim), he commenced his and the archbishop's campaign to gain control over churches in the diocese of Skálholt. The new bishop was successful at first. But he failed dramatically when it came to Jón Loptsson who was not ready to part with his or his family's wealth. As with the just man's nephew, it is said that public opinion sided with the chieftain. And it was largely due to Jón with his popular support and "saker ranglætis og ohlyðne sinna vndermanna"¹⁵¹ that the bishop's campaign came to a halt. Similarly, the just man's sentence was not carried out

¹⁴⁸*Íslendzka æventýri*, vol. 1, p. 90¹⁷⁴⁻¹⁸⁸.

¹⁴⁹This name is only preserved in version B, see *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 248¹.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 198¹⁻⁴. On Þorlákr's upbringing in Oddi, see p. 180.

¹⁵¹"because of the injustice and disobedience of his subordinates." Trans. from *ibid.*, p. 254⁸⁰. This is the context: "Those who gave themselves out to be the friends of both [i.e. Þorlákr and Jón] begged the bishop to yield, and the whole population did so as well [. . .] he sensed that the population supported Jón concerning the matter of church benefices [. . .] he suffered all sorts of troubles and evils in various matters because of the injustice and disobedience of his subordinates, as may be seen in the events that follow." Trans. from *ibid.*, pp. 253-4 (*Oddaverjaþáttur*).

by his *undirmenn* due to the "lymsku þeir höfdu sýnt bæði lögunum ok svá herra sínum."¹⁵² But when Þorlákr understood that he had to yield in the matter of church estates, he charged Jón Loptsson with another offence. The chieftain, who was married, had a notorious appetite for women, but especially scandalous was his long-standing relationship with Þorlákr's very own sister, Ragnheiðr Þórhallsdóttir.¹⁵³ It was for this adulterous union that Þorlákr excommunicated Jón, and because Jón was also unwilling to part with the bishop's sister, he was obdurately excommunicate for some time.¹⁵⁴

So apart from the seeming cruelty of the just man's sentence, his resolution on the deathbed, the deceitful disobedience of his subordinates, the popularity of the one punished by him and the close relations between the two, there is also a parallel in the offence, namely illegitimate sexual relations. And it was for this crime that the severest penalty in the spiritual sphere, as opposed to that of the temporal, was inflicted. The young noble was stabbed in the throat and killed for having violated a woman, and it was for violating the sanctity of marriage that Jón Loptsson was cut off with the sword—or

¹⁵²"[. . .] subordinates [. . .] the wiles they showed both towards their lord and the law." Trans. from *Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 90¹⁸⁷⁻⁸.

¹⁵³"He was married to a woman by the name of Halldóra, daughter of Brandr. Their son was Sæmundr. Jón was greatly given to love of women, for he had many other sons with various women: Þorsteinn and Halldór, Sigurðr and Einar, but Páll, who later became bishop, and Ormr, who later lived at Breiðabólstaðr, were his sons by Ragnheiðr Þórhallsdóttir, Bishop Þorlákr's sister. She and Jón had been in love since childhood, although she also had children with other men. Páll and Ormr, the sons of Jón and Ragnheiðr, were in their prime when Þorlákr came to Iceland consecrated as bishop. Páll lived at Ytra-Skarð and Ormr at Breiðabólstaðr. Jón often kept Ragnheiðr in his home at Oddi." Trans. from *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 251¹⁰⁻²⁰ (*Oddaverjapáttur*).

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.* (*Oddaverjapáttur*) pp. 253-254 (Þorlákr's scathing charge), 262-264 and 267-270 (his excommunication of Jón).

carving-knife—of excommunication.¹⁵⁵

Furthermore, if the molested woman in the tale of the just noble may be identified with the historical figure of Ragnheiðr, she can also, and perhaps more significantly, be seen as a personification of the *ecclesia* violated by Jón Loptsson. Woman and Church are symbolically equated in this respect. Indeed, Jón's pernicious desire for the latter leads to his undoing in the final chapter of *Oddaverja þáttur*. It is related that he was building a church and monastery at Keldur for his namesake John the Baptist. Jón was suddenly taken ill when he arrived at the site, but in spite of his serious illness, he had himself led into the doorway from where he could see the church, and there he addressed her with these last words: "There you stand, my church—you lament me and I lament you."¹⁵⁶ As Þorlákr is said to have predicted, St John did not receive the gift well, and Jón's death is clearly attributed to the stern justice of this saint. Naturally, John the Baptist sided with Þorlákr, the Icelandic saint who emulated him by suffering for his just condemnation of Jón's relationship with both women and churches. Therefore, if Þorlákr could only be said to have wounded Jón Loptsson with his excommunications, then the readers are with this account assured that his supporter in heaven delivered the *coup de grâce*. One is in fact led to wonder in view of this whether a forgotten *misericord* does not lurk behind Alpha's image of the *tálguknífr*.

It should be mentioned that there is a wealth of detail, some

¹⁵⁵Due to Jón Loptsson's threats, however, Þorlákr seems never to have dared pronounce major excommunication, i.e. full ceremonial anathema. This fact is revealed on pp. 267-269 of *Oddaverjaþáttur* in the ed. here used.

¹⁵⁶Trans. from *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 270¹³⁻¹⁴.

apparently lacking in other versions of the tale of the just noble, that do not make the foregoing interpretation of Jón's use of it at Staðarhóll less plausible, such as when the noble's subordinates are said not to have dared execute "svá kynstórum manni ok vænum til höfðingja",¹⁵⁷ or when the nephew's death-sentence is called an *útleigðarsök* along with other words or terms reminiscent of excommunication.¹⁵⁸ Most striking perhaps in this context is the

¹⁵⁷*Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 90¹⁶⁹. In trans.: "a man of such noble extraction and such a promising chieftain." The word *höfðingi* (but not *goði* for example) is used with particular emphasis in *Porláks saga* to describe Jón Loptsson, who was of course more powerful than a regular *goði*. See *Byskupa sǫgur*, vol. 2, pp. 198³ and 250³. This is also the case in *Páls saga biskups*, *ibid.*, p. 416³.

¹⁵⁸*Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 89¹⁶³. *Útleigð* means exile or banishment and *sök* an offence and *útleigðar*(gen.)-*sök* means an offence demanding exile. The word *pína*, on p. 89¹⁵⁵ and 89¹⁶², from Lat. *poena*—as in *poena excommunicationis*—is also used repeatedly by Jón Halldórson in his statute on excommunicable offences from 1326. The other word for punishment in Bishop Jón's tale, *stríða* on p. 89¹⁶², is used for Porlákr's excommunications in *Oddaverjabáttr*, see *Byskupa sǫgur*, vol. 2, on pp. 261⁵⁰, 263⁸ and 269⁸¹. Where it is said in Jón's story on p. 89¹³⁷⁻⁹ that "in his [i.e. the just noble's] residence and at his table there was a young man, the son of his sister by kinship, who served him daily along with other courteous men", it may be noted that Jón Loptsson was an ordained deacon according to *Oddaverjabáttr*. The word used to describe the "place" or "town" (*staðr*) the noble resided in on p. 88¹³² and 89¹⁴⁰ is the one used for church establishments like the episcopal seat in Skálholt (as in *Skálholtsstaðr*) and this is its meaning when added to place-names like *Staðarhóll*, the place where such an establishment had been erected on the farmstead and where Jón gave his sermon. Porlákr's (and Bishop Árni's) whole dispute with lay leader's was referred to as *Staðamál*, for it was basically a contest over the administration and ownership of (pl.) *staðir*. Pilgrims spoke of going to the *staðr* of Porlákr (*staðr Porláks*) when referring to *Skálholtsstaðr*. It may also be pointed out that in the rather detailed description of the building (or two houses or chambers) where the noble lay ill, the house, the partition between the two chambers and the closed door in that partition there are words also used in describing church-buildings, e.g. in ON homilies on the symbolic meaning of these and other parts of the House of God. One of these homilies is preserved in 624 with *Jóns báttr*, and this is also the chief MS for the penitential of St Porlákr. It should finally be noted how the just noble may be said to assume the characteristics of a celebrant at mass (and is thus juxtaposed to the officiating bishop in the tale), first by summoning God's presence and then by showing everyone present the miracle of Christ's body. This climax to the latter half of the tale corresponds in a certain sense to the climax in the first half, for the killing of the nephew has sacrificial overtones. A fair amount of word-play *might* thus have influenced Jón's and Alpha's version of the story so as to suit what was read in *Porláks saga*.

mýktarkoss,¹⁵⁹ or kiss of peace, the nephew expects from his uncle who stabs him instead with a carving-knife, since kisses—being like the host a symbol of Christian communion—were strictly forbidden to excommunicates.¹⁶⁰

Lastly, it is also possible to find correspondences between St Þorlákr and the noble with regard to the divine vindication of the latter. Bishop Páll translated Þorlákr's body into the cathedral of Skálholt in 1198. It is nevertheless clear that this was not Páll's idea.¹⁶¹ The incentive came from the northern diocese of Hólar. Around Christmas in 1197, the year Jón Loptsson had died from his illness, a certain priest in the diocese of Hólar dreamt that Þorlákr approached him and requested that his body be unearthed the following summer to ascertain if any signs of sanctity would be revealed.¹⁶² This dream was reported to Bishop Brandr of Hólar who in turn sent Páll letters describing the vision, along with other miracles attributed to Þorlákr, and Brandr advised him to translate Þorlákr's body.¹⁶³ Páll received these reports at the *alþingi* in 1198. Just before its close and after much discussion, he allowed people to invoke Þorlákr and recite the Office for him on the day of his death if they wished—"And as a token of God's approval, many remarkable miracles occurred at that same assembly."¹⁶⁴ After three weeks of continuous miracles, on the twentieth of July, Páll translated Þorlákr's

¹⁵⁹*Íslendzka æventýri*, vol. 1, p. 90¹⁸¹.

¹⁶⁰Cf. E. Vodola: *Excommunication in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986), pp. 7, 51-52 and refs. there given. See also *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 2, pp. 217 and 232.

¹⁶¹Cf. *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 417.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 226 (A) and 289-290 (B and C).

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, pp. 226-7 (A) and 291-292 (B and C).

¹⁶⁴Trans. from *ibid.*, p. 227¹³⁻¹⁴ (A); cf. 292-293 (B and C). Accounts of these miracles follow in all three versions.

body into Skálholt cathedral with the assistance of Bishop Brandr and his entourage.¹⁶⁵ But it was not until a year later, at the *alþingi* of 1199, that Páll declared the day of Þorlákr's death, the twenty-third of December, to be a feast day.¹⁶⁶ The day of Þorlákr's translation, however, was not declared a feast day until 1237.

Bishop Páll was thus in no great hurry to declare Þorlákr a saint, to grant what Þorlákr had himself allegedly requested in a vision along with the Bishop and clerics of Hólar and the people gathered at the *alþingi*. It is little wonder, therefore, that there arose some criticism of Páll for this reluctance, which could be construed as impious. This criticism was strong enough to make Páll's biographer, who wrote his brief work shortly after his subject's death, devote considerable space to defend the bishop's reaction to the rise of Þorlákr's sanctity. Where the translation of Þorlákr's body is described in *Páls saga*, its author relates that

Although Bishop Páll was more pleased with this news than most others, he conducted the matter with such caution that he took counsel with all the chieftains and the wisest of men in how to deal with this affair. And there was not wanting a report among some people that he wished the matter of blessed Bishop Þorlákr's sanctity not to get abroad. But he acted as he did because he wished to repay God for the glory he had brought about in his days, the like of which had never revealed itself before, and because he wished it to be managed in every respect as he thought most pleasing to God. He deemed it a difficulty, as it indeed was, that too much be made of this matter at first and that it might not be proven true. But no one was more ready to believe and promote the glory and sanctity of blessed Bishop Þorlákr than he, although he treated it with more caution than others.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 238-239 (A), 304-306 (B) and 344-345 (C).

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 277 (A) and 292 (B and C).

¹⁶⁷Trans. from *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 41712-25 (*Páls saga*).

Regardless of what actually went through Bishop Páll's mind, people could hardly have helped associating his cautious actions with his parentage. For Páll was the illegitimate son of Jón Loptsson and Þorlákr's sister, Ragnheiðr. That Páll was the fruit of this infamous and forbidden union, along with the fact that he brought a halt to his uncle's reforms,¹⁶⁸ serves very well to explain the memory of his controversial attitude towards St Þorlákr and especially the omission of these and related matters in the older version of *Þorláks saga*. It should also be noted at this point how it is through the figure of their sister that the just noble and Þorlákr are bound into kinship with the lustful offender they punish. The predominant emphasis in the *exemplum* of the noble on his unbending justice when it came to his own kinsman is thus seen to be a most apt exemplification of "how just the blessed Þorlákr was and zealous in observing God's law," a concise but artful allegory of the events that the author of *Þorláks saga B* wished to relate and which he described with words almost identical to these in his emphatic and ornate prologue to *Oddaverja þáttir*.

Páll appears therefore to have been not only reluctant to recognize Þorlákr's sanctity, but also unwilling to honour and imitate what bishops in the time of Árni Þorláksson or Jón Halldórsson, when Þorlákr's reforms had largely been carried out, deemed the most praiseworthy and important basis for Þorlákr's sainthood. Bishop Árni's excommunications on the Day of St Þorlákr have already been

¹⁶⁸Páll was not the ideal candidate for the episcopate according to the Reformers: He was an illegitimate offspring, a chieftain (*goði*), married and with children. It is understandable that this son of Jón Loptsson did not continue Þorlákr's reforms and that he was consecrated with the support of the excommunicate King Sverrir of Norway.

mentioned, but as far as Bishop Jón's appreciation of his reforming predecessor is concerned, one might point to the *bannsakabréf* issued by him in 1326. This statute consists of a long list of automatically excommunicable crimes to be read aloud at least twice a year to every congregation in the land. The twenty-four offences listed there chiefly concern the liberty of the Church and they include all those St Þorlákr punished his opponents for by excommunication according to *Oddaverja þáttur*. Interestingly enough, at the end of this statute, Jón is said to have published it in the cathedral of Skálholt "jn translacione sancti thorlaci episcopi."¹⁶⁹

If the foregoing interpretation of the tale of the just noble is close to that expounded at Staðarhóll, then it should be plain why Jón and Alpha chose to have a bishop, and not an ordinary priest, misjudge the just noble and then be corrected by God. It should also account for two features unparalleled in the other versions of the tale, namely the explanation that "because he [i.e. the just noble] was the equal of a king although he held a lesser title, the service of anointing could only be performed by the bishop",¹⁷⁰ and the special description of the just man's funeral, the statement that he "was buried with all the more honour and everyone's devotion the better it was known how God himself deemed his steadfastness and righteousness."¹⁷¹ These sanctifying features might very well have been added by Jón or Alpha so as to make the tale not only refer to St Þorlákr's grim dealings with his secular enemies, but to the triumphant translation of his relics as well. Only a bishop could perform such ceremonies

¹⁶⁹*Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 2, p. 594⁵.

¹⁷⁰Trans. from *Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 90¹⁹¹⁻¹⁹².

¹⁷¹Trans. from *ibid.*, p. 92²⁴⁴⁻²⁴⁶.

according to canon law,¹⁷² and indeed, Páll only did so after God's miraculous vindication of the saint.

It should then be quite clear why Jón and Alpha could afford to have a blameworthy bishop feature in their tale, thus risking a mistaken association of Bishop Þorlákr with him among those unlikely few who were ignorant of St Þorlákr, since the tale could not have corresponded in such a detailed and succinct manner to the events surrounding Þorlákr's righteousness and the recognition of his sanctity as these are described in *Þorláks saga B* had anyone other than a bishop misjudged and then honoured the just noble.

Yet today, one would hardly appreciate this final but indispensable correspondence with regard to the second half of the tale of the noble—that is to say how his divine vindication and joyful burial may recall by analogy the miraculous rise of Þorlákr's cult and the translation of his relics—were it not for the previously mentioned piece on Pope Gregory VI. This Roman legend has inherently far more precise and conspicuous links with the past as it was perceived through the eyes of the partisans of ecclesiastical reform, and it appears to be intimately connected with the tale of the just nobleman also written by Alpha.

As noted before, the conventional use of the sword as a symbol for excommunication features in the tale of Pope Gregory VI. It is preserved in the two chief manuscripts of *Jóns pátttr* and other works of Alpha, 624 and 657, and it immediately precedes *Jóns pátttr* in each collection. In this context the final words of the preface to 624's

¹⁷²This had been the rule since Carolingian times and the reservation of this right to the papacy did not really establish itself until the first half of the thirteenth century. Cf. E. W. Kemp: *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (Oxford, 1948), p. 107.

collection of *exempla*, which serve as an introduction to this first tale of the compilation (i.e. of Gregory VI), are worthy of note. After Alpha's brief discussion of how sacred writings assist men in abandoning vices and pursuing virtues, he admits that, although some of his tales might appear more entertaining than strictly religious—a point notably resumed in the defence of Jón and his tales in *Jóns þáttr*—it is his pious intention to entertain his readers with these delectable tales and keep them thus from some blameworthy activity full of sin and guilt. And he concludes: “ok því sýniz vel fallit at fyrsta *capitulum* byriz af því efni, hvat hreinferðug ást vinna má fyrir guði, þótt sjálft verkit sýniz meinum sambundit.”¹⁷³ This apologetic theme, contrasting the outward appraisal of humans to the inward-looking and superior judgement of God, is highly significant. Besides applying to Alpha himself, Pope Gregory VI and Jón Halldórsson as he is described in Alpha's *þáttr* about him, it is recognized as being resumed shortly thereafter in the tale about the just noble (and thus St Þorlákr) in *Jóns þáttr*. These ties between the tale of Gregory VI on the one hand and Jón Halldórsson in the *þáttr*, the just noble in the same *þáttr* and Alpha's view of his own work according to his prologue on the other must call for a closer inspection of this tale of Pope Gregory VI.

The tale runs as follows. During Gregory VI's pontificate the properties of the Roman Church are seized by evil warriors. After many appeals, the Pope finally resorts to full excommunications. “But when the spiritual sword of the Lord Pope and St Peter has no visible

¹⁷³“It is therefore apt that the first *capitulum* commence with the issue of what immaculate love can earn from God although the deed itself seems fettered to iniquity.” Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 434-35.

effect,”¹⁷⁴ then Pope Gregory orders the emperor to “unsheathe his royal sword as is his duty when confronted with such unheard-of evil.”¹⁷⁵ The emperor replies that he is unable to assist due to war elsewhere and requests that the Pope discipline these evil men himself. Pope Gregory thereupon assembles a great army that then kills the offenders “and Holy Church thereby receives her former freedom.”¹⁷⁶

But the cardinals speak secretly together after this victory and decide that Pope Gregory “has bloodied both his hands by the aforesaid manslaughter and that he is therefore unworthy of such holy station.”¹⁷⁷ They do, however, not make their opinion known until the Pope lies on his deathbed. The cardinals then send one from their midst into his chamber and this prelate tells the Pope that he and his colleagues find it

both unscrupulous and unbecoming that he be buried in St Peter’s church amongst holy bishops [*millum heilagra biskupa*]. The Lord Pope thereupon, full of holy wisdom and accusation against those who speak thus among themselves, boldly refutes, taking manifold lawful examples [*vitnisburð lögtekinna dæma*] and citations from sacred scriptures, showing how horribly wrong they were in their understanding of the matter [*hversu ferliga rangt þeir skilðu þetta mál*] and he finally commits the entire matter to God’s judgement [*býðr þar meðr at síðuztu allt þetta efni upp á guðs dóm*], with the orders that they lock the doors of St Peter’s firmly: ‘And if she does not open herself and receive my lifeless body without man’s assistance, then the cardinals shall be proven wholly right in their aforesaid understanding. But if the holy church of St Peter receives us rejoicefully’ says the Lord Pope, ‘with God’s will, you shall rightly see to it that I be buried next to the other bishops who supervised her. Otherwise, you may dispose of this bishop as you wish.’ To cut a

¹⁷⁴Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 50¹⁶⁻¹⁸.

¹⁷⁵Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 50¹⁹⁻²⁰.

¹⁷⁶Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 50²⁶.

¹⁷⁷Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 51²⁹⁻³⁰.

long story short, when the Lord Pope has passed away, all the locks and bolts of the holy church of St Peter burst away with a great din, and she rejoicefully welcomes her deceased lord. This holy bishop is then buried with all the more honour the better his case was proven both before God and men.¹⁷⁸

The close resemblance between this tale and that of the just noble is irrefutable. Indeed, the parallels in both detail and general design are so substantial that the latter might be described as a feudalized version of the same legend. Pope Gregory VI responds to the terrible crimes committed against Holy Church first by declaring his sentence of excommunication, that is to say, by using the spiritual sword of St Peter. And when his secular deputy, the Emperor, does not wield his sword of temporal authority as is his duty, then the Pope does so himself, thereby serving justice first in word and then in deed. Later, when the Pope lies bedridden and dying in his chamber, the prelates deem him unfit for the holy burial all pontiffs are to receive because of his sanguinary state. Thus deserted and condemned by his fellows and denied this holy rite, the Pope defiantly commits the entire matter to God's judgement and is dramatically vindicated by God with a miracle at the gates of St Peter's.

The striking similarity between the two tales must raise questions as to the origin of the piece on Gregory VI and its relation to the tale of the just noble. As Gering noted, Alpha's tale of Gregory VI is in fact a greatly abbreviated version of a legend found first in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*, which was written around 1220, and Alpha perhaps took this shortened version from the *Speculum historiale* by the Dominican Vincent of Beauvais, who

¹⁷⁸Trans. from *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 50³⁴-1⁵².

wrote his work around 1260.¹⁷⁹ The tale of Gregory VI was thus committed to writing about one century before the tale of the just noble made its first appearance in Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogue*.

The curious resemblance between the two tales, that of the just noble and that of Gregory VI, manifests itself even at the verbal level in Alpha's version of them. The final statement that the just noble "greptaðiz því sæmiligarr ok af öllum góðfúsligarr, sem gjörla var vitat hvern veg guði sjálfum hefir virz hans einörð ok réttvísi",¹⁸⁰ is a comparative phrase that should clearly be set beside the last, and likewise comparative, phrase in the tale of Gregory VI: "greptaz sá heilagur biskup því sæmiligarr sem hans málavöxtr prófaðiz ágjætligarr bæði fyrir guði ok mönnum."¹⁸¹ This correspondence between the emphatic final words of both tales must surely show that Alpha recognized their affinity.

Now the final words of Alpha about the noble's burial do not appear in any other known version of that tale. Indeed, since they refer to how God revealed his judgement of the noble for all to see and this did *not*, as opposed to the tale of Gregory VI, occur at the noble's funeral but on his deathbed, then these words seem somewhat superfluous when the tale stands by itself. This, however, is certainly not the case when it is seen within Alpha's compilation of 657, and

¹⁷⁹Ibid., vol. 2, p. 35. For a version found in a collection of *exempla* from the first half of the 15th century (using Martin of Troppau) see *Libro de los exenplos por A. B. C.* (Madrid, 1961), ed. J. E. Keller, p. 51. Cf. also Tubach's *Index exemplorum*, no. 2370: "Gregory, Pope, vindicated of murder. Pope Gregory VI, accused by his cardinals of having killed thieves, is vindicated after his death when the doors of St. Peter's church spring open as his corpse is being carried inside." Tubach's cites only *Jóns þáttur* and the Spanish collection.

¹⁸⁰*Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 90²⁴⁵⁻²⁴⁶.

¹⁸¹Ibid., vol. 1, p. 51⁵⁰⁻⁵².

especially within Alpha's collection in 624. Although the final words seem inherently more suitable in the tale of Gregory VI due to its miraculous vindication at the Pope's funeral, their appearance at the end of Alpha's version of this tale is not paralleled elsewhere. The concluding words appear therefore to be an independent addition on Alpha's part in both tales, and the verbal echo they create within each collection of Alpha seems to have come about because Alpha was well aware of the aforementioned similarities between the two tales and because he wished to accentuate this correspondence by giving them a similar concluding interpretation. Thus, at the end of the tale of the noble, Alpha recapitulates the statement he has already given, albeit more aptly, in the conclusion to the tale of Gregory VI, which precedes the tale of the noble in each collection. This connection of the two tales is seen both in 657 and 624. But due to the aforementioned words at the end of Alpha's prologue to the collection of *exempla* in 624, which serve to introduce the tale of Gregory VI, then this recapitulation is much more pronounced and momentous in 624 than in 657. The apologetic theme at the end of Alpha's prologue to the collection in 624, the theme of how an ostensibly wrongful act can disguise an immaculate and saintly feat rewarded by God, becomes thus something like a guiding principle for Alpha in 624. This makes it also look like a more thought-out compilation than 657, and this is in keeping with our note that some of the material in 657 appears to be consciously shortened and refined in 624. Besides the abbreviation of the long tale about the fairy mistress, one should point especially to the discarding of the last chapter of *Jóns pátttr* some readers could have deemed tasteless because of the representation of

Jón's soul as a maiden, an omission that makes the tale of the just noble and its last words conclude the *páttir* of Jón and thus accentuate the alignment of these two saintly figures. The most obvious alteration, however, is Alpha's composition of an edifying prologue to his tales to replace the much shorter and rather light-hearted one in 657. In view of this more strategic, unified and refined treatment of the material in 624, an integrity resulting mainly from the apologetic theme introduced at the end of the new prologue, we are led to conclude that Alpha's collection in 624 was put together somewhat later than 657.

Other examples of such careful rewriting of ecclesiastical literature around the same time in Iceland will be discussed later. But we have yet to see where Alpha's guiding apologetic theme came from. Seeing as it is so closely connected to the two tales under discussion, then this issue must be of considerable importance in our interpretation of them and their possible relation to Jón's sermon at Staðarhóll. Its importance with regard to Alpha, his work and view of himself, and its subsequent importance with regard to his presentation of Jón Halldórsson and therefore our study of that man should also make it clear why this theme calls for more attention.

The longer version of the legend of Gregory VI (which first appears in the *Gesta regum* of William, the Benedictine monk in Malmesbury), as well as yet another abbreviation similar to that of Alpha, turns up amongst several miracle-collections of the Virgin in Old Norse.¹⁸² Its learned digressions seem suggestive as to the

¹⁸²*Marius saga* (Christiania [Oslo], 1871), ed. C. R. Unger, pp. 453-465 (longer version, in AM 655 XXXII 4to from ca. 1300-1400 and Holm perg 1 4to from ca. 1450-1500) and 1139-41 (shorter version, in Holm perg 1 8to from ca. 1325-1350). On the provenance of the shorter version, see O. Widding: "Nogle norske

original provenance and purpose of the legend. The very long speech given there by Gregory VI, after he has been judged unfit for sacred burial by the perfidious prelates, comprises a trenchant defence and exposition of the Gregorian ideology of reform and it is embedded in highly pretentious symbolism. There is an elaborate discussion on the two swords, the independence of the episcopate from secular lords and its firm allegiance to the Pope, the liberty of the Church, its proprietary rights, the duty of the secular arm to defend Holy Church with the temporal sword if her leaders' honour be "afblómgúð" (deflowered) by evil men and—perhaps most importantly—the right of the Roman as well as other bishops to wield this sword themselves if lay leaders do not do so when they should.¹⁸³ It is difficult to imagine a more clear and concise 'Gregorian' *exemplum*.

Now the vindicative or apologetic theme presented at the end of the preface to 624 and which introduces the tale of Gregory VI in that collection is also an issue in the Old Norse version of William of Malmesbury's piece on Gregory VI found in the Icelandic miracle-collections of Mary. The tale is there introduced with these words, which are at once an epilogue to a Marian miracle concerning a woman in Rome who had a child by her own son but who was later saved by Mary:

What is exalted and honourable in the eyes of men is often base and bad to God's eyes, for man sees only the countenance, but almighty God looks into the hearts of all men [I Sam. 16.7] [. . .] it therefore sometimes occurs, that what is very good in the eyes of God is ugly and awful in the eyes of men. Whereof we shall hear an

Marialegender." *Maal og minne* (1969), pp. 51-59, and esp. 57-58.

¹⁸³The "deflowering" of the Church is found on p. 458³ in *Mariusaga*.

example that begins thus.¹⁸⁴

This theme is not paralleled in William of Malmesbury's version of the tale of Gregory VI, which is in keeping with the fact that he does not relate the tale about the Roman woman. Therefore, seeing as it serves to bind together these two tales, of the woman who was saved by Mary and of Gregory VI, and since they have been joined in at least three collections of Marian miracles in Old Norse, dating from 1325-1375 (Holm perg. 1 8to), 1350-1360 (AM 233 a fol.) and 1300-1400 (AM 655XXXII 4to), in two of which this is done by employing the apologetic theme (the last two), it must be considered most likely that Alpha's apologetic theme at the end of his prologue in 624 and which introduces there the tale of Gregory VI (which has in this case no tale preceding it), is derived from Marian miracle-collections similar to these. Where this exegesis connecting the two tales in the Marian miracle-collections originates from within that genre is as yet impossible to determine, but Alpha certainly gave the idea behind it exceptional prominence in his collection of *exempla* in 624. Besides the fact that Alpha seems to be a firm believer in the reforming ideals illustrated in the tale of Gregory VI, this must result from Alpha's recognition—which may be Bishop Jón's or Alpha's own insight—that the tale of the just noble can be used as well to illustrate the Gregorian import of this theme. But to better understand its connection to the tale of the just noble, and thereby its possible connection to Jón's sermon at Staðarhóll, we must look closer at the background of the tale of Gregory VI.

¹⁸⁴*Mariu saga*, p. 453¹²⁻²¹. The Biblical reference is to Samuel's search for the Lord's anointed who is to replace Saul.

Now there is close chronological proximity between Gregory VI's pontificate (he was pope 1045-6 and died deposed the next year) and William of Malmesbury's first literary version of this tale about his posthumous vindication at the gates of St Peter's. Yet Gregory VI is not known to have ever been involved in the sort of Holy War described in this legend, and more importantly, his death and burial took place far away from Rome. He was moreover considered a simoniac by his contemporaries, and the practice of buying or selling ecclesiastical offices was naturally one of the first abuses the reformers sought to exterminate.¹⁸⁵ How this figure could become attached to such reforming propaganda is therefore highly curious, and indeed, this polemical fiction seems much more akin to the figure of his namesake, Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085). Neither pope, it is true, died in Rome, for both did so in exile, but the legendary Hildebrand had of course a far greater claim to sanctity among the reformers than Gregory VI. The reform movement itself takes its name from Gregory VII, and it was this leading proponent of reform who, in a spirit reminiscent of the legend of his namesake and predecessor, was particularly fond of using such scriptural quotations as Jeremiah 48:10 in his imperious letters: "Cursed be he who keepeth back his sword from blood."¹⁸⁶

It is furthermore significant with regard to Gregory VII that two central and related ideas promoted by him stand out in this fictitious tale of Gregory VI: namely, that the Pope can be judged by no man and that he is also undoubtedly made a saint by the merits of St

¹⁸⁵Cf. D. Feytmans: "Grégoire VI: était-il simoniaque?" *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'histoire* 11 (1932), pp. 30-137.

¹⁸⁶Cf. Stickler: "Il gladius", pp. 89-103.

Peter.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, Gregory VII's famous last words in Salerno: "I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity—therefore I die in exile", have a ring to them that sounds closely akin to the tone of this legend. Their unsaid triumphant conclusion in Scripture (Ps. 45: 8) leaves no doubt as to how God deems his dying servant: "You love righteousness and hate iniquity, wherefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Their defiant tenor, their expression of unquenched zeal for justice in spite of the condemnation of men in this world is very similar to the speech given by Gregory VI in the tale of his posthumous vindication.¹⁸⁸

On closer inspection the tale of Gregory VI appears therefore to be an *exemplum* fabricated by Gregorian polemicists to illustrate how the Pope can be judged by no man and is unquestionably made a saint by the merits of St Peter. The legend is obviously meant to prove this irrefutable supremacy and sanctity of the Pope by reference to the belief behind the Prince of the Apostles' title as "the heavenly wielder of the keys, who throws open the gate of heaven,"¹⁸⁹ and with the alleged manifestation of its reality in the triumphant entrance of the body of one of his devoted successors through the gates of St Peter's, "for the open doors of the earthly Church testified his eternal entrance."¹⁹⁰ That the miracle takes place in the context of an ordeal is of course meant to be taken as the ultimate proof that Gregory VI's

¹⁸⁷Cf. R. W. Southern: *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, England and New York, 1970), p. 102.

¹⁸⁸For a study of the importance of these last words of Gregory VII within the reform movement, see P. E. Hübinger: *Die Letzten Worte Papst Gregors VII* (Opladen, 1973).

¹⁸⁹On the significance of this title, cf. J. Pelikan: *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 3 (Chicago and London, 1978), 46-47.

¹⁹⁰Trans. from *Marius saga*, p. 465²⁴⁻²⁵.

deeds and long apologetic speech, however unjust these may seem to his fellow men, are in alignment with God's law, and that the Pope is the true overlord of Christendom.

St Peter's sacramental power to bind and to loose, as the holder of the keys to the kingdom of Heaven, as promised to him by Christ (Mat. 16.19), is thus taken as the basis for these papal claims to overlordship, and in turn the liberty of his Church. This privilege is referred to in the same manner in Jón Halldórsson's aforementioned *bannsakabréf* from St Þorlákr's feast day of translation in 1326, and it is aptly cited in the passage where Jón excommunicates those who violate the liberty of Holy Church.¹⁹¹

But this exacting document is not the only link between Jón's administrative activities and the tale of Gregory VI. His collection of Peter's Pence begun in 1330 comes immediately to mind, because this tax was regarded first of all as a tribute symbolizing the feudal relationship between the secular world and the Pope in Rome, where he reigns supreme in absolute authority. In view of the tale's ideological ties with this symbolic tax, one might wish to attach some significance to the fact that the tale first appears in the writings of an Anglo-Norman author, since England was the home of Peter's Pence.¹⁹²

It should be noted in connection with this feudal imagery concerning the Church how the tale of the just noble could of course, besides illustrating "how just the blessed Þorlákr was and zealous in

¹⁹¹ *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 2, p. 585¹⁰⁻²⁸. Exactly the same article appears in Archbishop Jón rauði's statute from 1280, cf. *ibid.*, p. 182¹⁴⁻³².

¹⁹² Cf. H. Nielsen: "Peterspenge." *KLNM*, vol. 13 (Copenhagen, 1968), cols. 249-252.

observing God's law", serve as an example to secular leaders, pointing out their moral duty to carry out the sentences pronounced by the Pope or Holy Church in accordance with God's law, for instance those Jón published in his *bannsakabréf* of 1326. In the longer version of the tale of Gregory VI in the Old Norse miracles of Mary there is a passage dealing with this sort of figure. The theme is brought up in connection with the lay investiture of bishops. It is stated that Pope Hadrian I gave Charlemagne so much power in the affairs of the Church that no bishop could be appointed and invested without the consent of the Emperor. This act of the Pope is said to have been not only just at the time but even praiseworthy because Charlemagne "was tested in the virtue that no bribe or discrimination deceived his eye [*at engin femvta ne manna mvnir sveik hans auga*] wherefore no-one was able to sneak secretly or with cunning into God's army, for each and every one went uprightly in through the official doorway."¹⁹³ There is thus a markedly anti-simoniactal element attached to the Gregorian ideal of the secular ruler presented in this oldest version of the tale. It is in fact stated there that, because lay leaders are no longer as immaculate in their judgements as Charlemagne, then this privilege, long ago given by the Pope to the Emperor, has now been taken back from secular rulers by Holy Church.

The words of praise concerning Charlemagne's just rule, "*at engin femvta ne manna mvnir sveik hans auga*", are paralleled, but notably not in connection with simony, in the description of the just noble's government, who "*virði jafnan meira málaefni en mútur eðr manna*

¹⁹³*Mariusaga*, p. 461⁷⁻¹⁰.

mun, hvárt í hlut átti náinn eðr úskyldr.”¹⁹⁴ In the tale of the noble, bribery or simony is not the issue, but discrimination based on kinship, a vice the noble cannot be accused of after his harsh but just execution of his nephew. These words seem in fact to have been a hagiographic commonplace regarding just rulers, even if they were churchmen. They appears for example in *Tómas saga II*, the final and florissant version of St Thomas of Becket’s saga from around the same time as *Jóns þáttur*. Thomas’ capacity as a judge is there described thus: “he was always seen to have been the most just judge, bending right judgement neither for bribes nor discrimination [*er huorki halladi riettum domi fyrir fíemutur ne mannamun*].”¹⁹⁵ Interestingly, these words in *Thómas saga II* seem to derive from the same collections of Marian miracles in Old Norse the tale of Pope Gregory VI is found in, namely in a tale of St Thomas that immediately follows that very legend in these collections.¹⁹⁶

Heavenly reward for this immaculate conduct of secular or ecclesiastical rulers could of course not be illustrated in the polemics of the reformers with a miracle at the gates of St Peter’s. This vindication would only suit a pope, and it seems in fact to have been reserved in legend for Gregory VI. A more common symbol was to be employed for other rulers in Christendom, namely miraculous communion, incorporation into Christ instead of St Peter. Although a doorway does feature dramatically in the tale of the just noble, this

¹⁹⁴*Íslendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 89¹³⁶⁻¹³⁷.

¹⁹⁵*Thomas saga erkibyskups*, ed. C. R. Unger (Christiania [Oslo], 1869), p. 445³⁵⁻⁹.

¹⁹⁶See for example *Mariu saga*, p. 200¹⁰⁻¹⁸. For a list of the other variants containing the phrase about the just St Thomas in these Marian collections, see Widding: “Nogle norske Marialegender,” p. 58.

embodiment of the ideal secular ruler is vindicated by virtue of Christ's body and not by a passage through a doorway. When we note that his figure is an expansion of one already present in the much older legend of Pope Gregory VI, and that the just noble is described in the same terms as Charlemagne, the ideal secular ruler in this older legend, it seems most probable that the legend of the just noble was consciously modelled on the former. It is difficult to explain the presence of this ideal and the distinct description of it in the tale of the noble in any other way, especially in view of how the overall design of the story of the noble closely corresponds to that of Pope Gregory VI.

This later and elaborated figure of the just secular ruler appears to have been given a specialized role within the Church. He is not as powerful with regard to the Church as Charlemagne was, for he has been demoted under the nascent clerical supremacy. But he is still to guard and avenge any wrongs she suffers. As the tale of Gregory VI seeks to demonstrate, if he does not fulfil this retained role of wielding the temporal sword in accordance with God's law, then bishops, and especially the Roman bishop, can assume this duty. If this ideal of the secular ruler is to be studied any closer, it would have to be in the context of the *militia sancti Petri*, St Peter's and the Pope's army, the soldiers of Christ and defenders of the Church, an ideal closely related to the ideology of the Crusades and the Cistercian ideal of Christian Knighthood.¹⁹⁷ The figure of Charlemagne was in fact central to the literature promoting this ideal and the notion of Holy War, since in the war that was to be waged on behalf of the Church,

¹⁹⁷On this ideal, see I. S. Robinson: "Gregory VII and the Soldiers of Christ." *History* 58 (1973), pp. 169-191.

where men were to enter into her military service, all the feudal imagery that could be invoked was used to bind their loyalties better to their supreme lord, the Pope.

Much polemic literature was produced for the advancement of such an ideal around the time of William of Malmesbury and Caesarius of Heisterbach. With regard to the just noble in the latter's work, it is intriguing to see that the means of vindication in this tale, one apparently modelled on the tale of the vindication of Pope Gregory VI at the gates of St Peter's, are very closely associated with the area that has the strongest and oldest links to this tale: Cantimpré, Brussels, Cologne and Liège, for the last place was the birthplace and early centre of the feast of Corpus Christi.¹⁹⁸

It therefore appears likely that the tale of the just noble was created in the area around Lower Lorraine, when some polemicist, perhaps a Cistercian like Caesarius, sought to reproduce the legend of Pope Gregory VI for the advancement of the ideal of the lay ruler already lurking in that legend. And since he would have been forced to find new means to prove his hero's heavenly vindication, he understandably chose to use a symbol at the centre of an emergent cult in his milieu, namely that of Corpus Christi. The oldest version of this tale is preserved among other miracle-tales of the host, but it is clear from later variants that its theme of unbending equity rewarded by God was not overshadowed by Christ's body. This is quite natural since the host, like the gates of St Peter's, is not the chief theme of the tale, but the token that highlights and proves the truth of its theme.

Despite the change of hero and the means of his vindication, the

¹⁹⁸On the rise of this feast in Liège, see Rubin: *Corpus Christi*, pp. 164-176.

tale of the just noble thus retained much of the Gregorian import of its model. Indeed, it so happened that Jón Halldórsson used it to illustrate the justice of a *churchman* remembered for his reforms in Iceland, and Alpha, perhaps here indebted to Jón, noted the affinity between the two tales and used them to illustrate his guiding theme in 624. It is of course possible that Alpha or Jón became acquainted with the link between the two tales from some now unknown source, but the inherent and obvious affinity between the two legends does not make this assumption necessary.

The three most prominent acts of Jón Halldórsson's episcopate, the *bannsakabréf* of 1326, the introduction of Corpus Christi in the same year and the collection of Peter's Pence begun shortly thereafter in 1330 may also assist in proposing a specific year for Jón's sermon at Staðarhóll. There are five years to be considered, since we know that Jón visited the western quarter in 1324, 1327, 1330, 1333 and 1337.¹⁹⁹ Gering conjectured in view of this and Jón's visitation in 1330 of two churches not far from Staðarhóll (in Selárdalur and Búðardalur) that 1330 is the most likely year for Jón's sermon.²⁰⁰ But Jón could of course have travelled through this region on all his visits to the western quarter and our knowledge of his visit to these two churches is of limited value in this respect. However, taking into consideration the three important acts of Jón's episcopate mentioned above, the tale of the just noble and its illustration of St Þorlákr's ecclesiastical justice must appear to have been of the greatest immediacy in the summers of 1327 and 1330, and the special

¹⁹⁹These visitations are all noted in *Gottskálksannáll* (no. VIII in Storm's ed.).

²⁰⁰*Islandzk æventyri*, vol. 2, p. xii-xiii.

commemoration of its use in Alpha's compilation of *exempla* also indicates that it had considerable relevance at the time of Jón's sermon. The former year is less likely, for Jón would perhaps not have wished to make a detour to Staðarhóll on his way to the urgent meeting at Möðruvellir held on July twenty-ninth in 1227. If our interpretation of the tale's significance in Jón's sermon and its special relevance in 1330 is sound, then this would have been a momentous year for Jón indeed. Besides mentioning his visitation to the remotest parts of the western quarter and his receiving of the papal letters requesting tribute to St Peter from his diocese, the annals report that Jón's brother, Finnur Halldórsson died in this year, that Jón's good friend Hákon Erlingsson became bishop of Bergen, and that Jón attended a great wedding at Hagi in the western quarter where the most important leaders in the country were gathered.²⁰¹

In this study of Jón's sermon at Staðarhóll it is of course hard to distinguish between what genuinely comes from Jón and what from Alpha, but the former's institution of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1326, his *bannsakaþréf* in the same year and his collection of Peter's Pence begun in 1330 makes it plausible that much of what has here been connected to Jón's sermon is ultimately derived from his own imagination as both a preacher and bishop. Even Alpha's subtle alignment of Bishop Jón and St Þorlákr in *Jóns þáttur* may originate in Jón's own mind, since these important acts of his as bishop demanded that he assume the *persona* of his holy predecessor, entrusted to him by his office, with all the awe and authority it invoked.²⁰² One can at

²⁰¹*Íslandske annaler*, IV, V, VIII, IX (all date these events to 1330).

²⁰²This is most clearly the case in the *bannsakaþréf* from 1326.

any rate easily see how the tale of Pope Gregory VI which depicts the very archetype of such ecclesiastical enactments and which Jón almost certainly knew and perhaps even told at Staðarhóll—a church that was in fact dedicated to St Peter²⁰³—would have appealed to him as he prepared his sermon for the day of a saint chiefly honoured for his Gregorian enterprise in Iceland, and how naturally it would have influenced the tale, already strikingly similar, with which Jón chose to illustrate “how just the blessed Þorlákr was and zealous in observing God’s law.”

These notable events of Jón’s episcopate, along with the sources discussed in the previous pages, give us therefore hopefully some idea of Jón’s sermon in the church of St Peter at Staðarhóll. By employing the example of the just noble with the foregoing interpretations of it in mind, he could have expanded his sermon in ways typical of the preaching art.²⁰⁴ He could have discussed significant words appearing in the tale such as *staðr*, *höfðingi*, *útleğðarsök*, *pína*, *stríða* or *mýktarkoss*, explained the property of the *tálgukníf* that cuts away scandalous iniquities,²⁰⁵ and cited *Þorláks saga* and the tale of Pope Gregory VI as his authority for a number of striking similitudes and analogies.

²⁰³*Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 4 (Copenhagen, 1897), ed. J. Porkelsson, p. 79.

²⁰⁴Cf. M. G. Briscoe: *Artes Praedicandi* (=Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, vol. 61, Brepols, 1992).

²⁰⁵In the prologue to the second recension of *Þorláks saga* (i.e. not the prologue to *Oddaverjaþáttur*, but apparently by the same author), there is no less of an emphasis on the saint’s observance of canon law than in the prologue to *Oddaverjaþáttur*: “Jesus Christ, true God and true man, chose him first of his righteous men in this land to shine undoubtedly with glorious sanctity [. . .] this blessed bishop has walked the correct path of the commandments [. . .] obeyed God and his law [. . .] beautifully cleansed Christianity’s countenance with the sentences he pronounced, carving away the disgraceful iniquities [*brot sníðandi lyti lafana*].” Trans. from *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2, p. 241¹⁵⁻¹⁹.

The *Þorlákstíðir*, St Þorlákr's Office composed in the fourteenth century, may be added to the list. This most important liturgical work of medieval Iceland may in fact also be derived from Jón's years as bishop of Skálholt, seeing as its melodic material is entirely borrowed from Dominican models. And as one would expect from a work of this period dedicated to St Þorlákr, it contains allusions to the saint's zealous struggle for the liberty of Holy Church. This image of Þorlákr is perhaps most prominent in these two bellicose versicles where St Paul's martial imagery in Ephesians (6:10-20) is used to portray the Icelandic reformer as standing triumphant in the full panoply of Christ's champions:

Induis iusticie,
 Thorlace, thoracem,
 pugnas et malicie
 extinguis fornacem.

Gravium certaminum
 te exponens faci,
 usque vite terminum
 obstas pervicaci.²⁰⁶

For Jón's sermon at Staðarhóll, however, these brutal verses of the Fifty-seventh Psalm would have been exquisitely apt: "Letabitur iustus cum uiderit uindictam. Manus suas lavabit in sanguine peccatoris. Et

²⁰⁶*Sancti Thorlaci episcopi officia rhythmica et proprium missæ in Am 241 a folio* (= *Editiones Arnæmagnæanæ, Supplementum*, vol. 3, Copenhagen 1959), ed. R. A. Ottóson, p. 86. In trans.: "Thorlacus [you] put on the breastplate of righteousness/ [you] fight and extinguish iniquities and fornication./ Exposing yourself in the face of the greatest struggles/ [you] stand firm until the end of life." The scriptural derivation of this imagery of the breastplate of righteousness is not noted by the editor.

dicet homo, si utique est fructus iusto, utique est deus iudicans eos in terra.²⁰⁷ But without further research into the many sources and events under discussion, little more can be said along these lines without changing this study into a sermon.

²⁰⁷The righteous man washes his feet in modern versions, but the text in the Vulgate is different: "The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance, he shall wash his hands in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say: 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God that judges in the earth.'"

Chapter four

The provenance of *Jóns þátr* and the identity of 'Alpha'

It seems plain from the mention of Jón's friend Hákon, in the last chapter of *Jóns þátr* in 657, as being "at that time bishop of Bergen [*þann tíma Björgvinar biskupi*]",²⁰⁸ that these words could hardly have been written before 1342, seeing as Bishop Hákon died in that year.²⁰⁹ The words *þann tíma* sound moreover as if a number of years had passed since Hákon's death. Alpha's note that King Magnus and Archbishop Eilífr were already dead when Jón dreamt of them and the heavenly ladder indicates this as well, for it apparently presupposes that his readers need not remember when the two had died, which was in 1280 and 1332 respectively. Seeing therefore as the oldest manuscript of *Jóns þátr* (which alone contains the chapter with the note on Hákon) dates from about 1350, then it appears that the piece should date from sometime between 1342 and 1360 and that it is appropriate to consider the latter half of this period the more likely for its composition.

It has already been noted how the tale of the tempest in Paris is in accordance with the editorial principles of 764 4to abbreviated in that manuscript and taken out of its context in *Jóns þátr*. Since 764 was completed in 1372,²¹⁰ or shortly thereafter, and has distinctly

²⁰⁸*Íslendzka æventýri*, vol. 1, p. 93⁵³⁻⁵⁴.

²⁰⁹On Hákon, see E. Bull: "Haakon Erlingsson." *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, vol. 10 (Oslo, 1931), pp. 158-159.

²¹⁰The annal at the back of the MS ends with this year.

northern qualities, for instance in its annals' comments on Möðruvallahall and the nunnery of Staðr in Reynisnes,²¹¹ then it appears as if *Jóns þátr* became known relatively early within the diocese of Hólar. This northern connection of the piece may perhaps also be seen in Einar Hafliðason's obituary note on Bishop Jón in *Lögmánnasannáll*. Einar's annal is the only source besides *Jóns þátr* that mentions the Preacher's posthumous reputation as a saint:

Obitus dompni Johannis Skalhottensis episcopi who was *idoneus predicator*, whom men believe blessed before God [*hyggja godan fyrir gude*] and which is testified by the signs [*tekn*] that appear at his grave.²¹²

This appraisal of the Preacher and the report of miracles at his grave may be taken from a source common to Einar and Alpha, if not from *Jóns þátr* itself. It should be remembered in this context how Jón is described with respect and admiration in *Laurentius saga* despite his dispute with the subject of that saga. This amicable attitude towards Jón and the fact that he ordained Einar in 1332 after Laurentius' death may play a part in Einar's positive words about Jón's sanctity. His brief comment is, however, quite cautious, especially when contrasted with the emphatic and assured claims made by Alpha in *Jóns þátr*.

Curiously, then, the only writings that seem to use the same sources as the author of *Jóns þátr*, perhaps even the *þátr* itself, a

²¹¹Ó. Halldórsson suggests that Brynjólfur Bjarnarson (d. 1381) from Akur in Blönduhlíð in the diocese of Hólar had this MS written in the nunnery at Staðr in Reynisnes (in the same diocese). He was steward there sometime between 1370-1380 and his hand can be identified in the MS. See Ó. Halldórsson's "Úr sögu skinnbóka." *Skírnir* 137 (1963), pp. 99-104.

²¹²Trans. from *Íslandske annaler*, p. 272 (for 1338).

piece commemorating a Bishop of Skálholt, apparently come from the diocese of Hólar. The younger medieval manuscript containing *Jóns þáttir*, 624 4to, must moreover have been written, at least partly, in that diocese. The hand of Jón Þorvaldsson (last heard of in 1512), once steward at the aforementioned convent at Staðr, the bishop's deputy at Hólar and Abbot of Þingeyrar, has been identified in this manuscript, and it has written the part containing the longer (and apparently later) prologue by Alpha and the tale of Gregory VI, *Jóns þáttir*, and the three tales of Boniface VIII (that is to say pages 298-312).²¹³

This state of affairs accords well with the two suggestions about the authorship of *Jóns þáttir*. Peter Hallberg presented a theory based on his lexico-statistical analyses of the corpus attributed to Alpha and many other works in Old Norse, a very limited but sometimes useful study, that Alpha is to be identified with the hagiographer Bergr Sökkason. Bergr was abbot of Munkaþverá, a Benedictine monastery in the diocese of Hólar, and he is last heard of in 1345.²¹⁴

Stefán Karlsson has suggested in turn that Arngrímr Brandsson is to be identified with Alpha.²¹⁵ Arngrímr was abbot of Þingeyrar between 1351 and 1361 or 1362, the other Benedictine monastery in the diocese of Hólar. Stefán pointed to the very close resemblance between the style of Alpha and that of *Guðmundar saga D*, the fourth and final *vita* of Guðmundur Arason (1161-1237), bishop of Hólar.

²¹³See p. xv in the introduction by E. G. Pétursson to his ed. *Míðaldaævintýri þýdd úr ensku* (= *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi*, vol. 11, Reykjavík, 1976). The handwriting of the following six tales, also attributed to Alpha, is found as well in parts of the MS before the handwriting of Jón Þorvaldsson commences.

²¹⁴See Hallberg's *Stilsignalelement*, pp. 179-187. Bergr's literary activities are mentioned in *Laurentius saga*, p. 73¹⁻⁵.

²¹⁵See his "Icelandic Lives of Thomas à Becket," pp. 235-238.

Arngrímr is several times named as the author in the saga itself and he cites himself once as a witness in one of the miracle-tales that follow the *vita*. Hallberg had already noted this resemblance between Alpha's style and that of *Guðmundar saga D*. But instead of attributing the saga to Arngrímr, he wished on the basis of his method to assign it to Bergr, or more precisely, he suggested that Bergr translated it from a (now lost) Latin original by Arngrímr. But although the saga is clearly intended for a readership outside as well as within Iceland, we need not suppose that it was originally composed in Latin. In any case, if *Guðmundar saga D* is indeed a translation from a Latin original, then Arngrímr is undoubtedly the most likely translator. His authorship of *Guðmundar saga D* should in fact be considered almost as certain as Bergr Sokkason's authorship of *Nikuláss saga*, the cornerstone of Hallberg's attribution of other works to Bergr (curiously, these include *Clarus saga*).

Stefán suggests, then, that Arngrímr Brandsson, who was almost certainly the author of *Guðmundar saga D*, is also to be credited with the work attributed to Alpha by Gering. This identification forms however only a part of Stefán's main theory, which is namely that the same Arngrímr wrote *Thómas saga II* as well, another major work of hagiography from about the same period as *Guðmundar saga D* and one written in the same peculiar brand of fourteenth-century florid style which is also characteristic of the works attributed to Alpha. *Thómas saga II* is the last and most complete Icelandic saga of the English martyr and is in this respect similar to *Guðmundar saga D* in the latter's relation to other versions of the Icelandic saint's saga. The two share moreover the same aggressive Gregorian ideas and

sentiments along with other traits pointing to one and the same author.

Indeed, Hallberg wished on the grounds of his lexico-statistical investigations to attribute all three works, *Guðmundar saga D*, *Thómas saga II* and the *exempla* of Alpha to Bergr Sökkason. Stefán, however, is

inclined to think that Hallberg has demonstrated some common characteristics of two or more authors working at the same time, in the first half of the fourteenth century, and at least partially in the same environment, the Benedictine monasteries in northern Iceland.²¹⁶

He accordingly makes important distinctions within the enormous corpus of works attributed by Hallberg to Bergr, but not only on the grounds of style, for he does so also in view of the employment of sources, the treatment of material and characteristic themes and ideas.

Stefán supported his identification of Alpha and the author of *Thómas saga II* primarily by demonstrating how Alpha's *exemplum* of William the Conqueror and his sons is carefully incorporated into *Thómas saga II*, and how the tale's prefatory remark as to the true, that is to say in Gregorian terms, foundation of Thomas' *Vita* and the older saga's omission of it corresponds closely to the outlook and manner with which *Thómas saga II* is written.²¹⁷ The florid preface to the tale is as follows:

²¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 237-238.

²¹⁷This is tale no. 16 in Gering's ed. It is found in 657, but not in the same group of *exempla* as *Jóns þáttur* in that MS. The Gregorian basis for the story of St Thomas explained in this tale is perhaps most clearly used in chapters. 1-2, 6 and 10-11 in *Thomas saga II*.

Two notable clerics, Bergr Gunnsteinsson and Jón hestr, have written lives of the venerable Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, each in his own way, describing how he fought for Christianity in England up to his martyrdom; nevertheless neither of them has taken the basis of the story, which is recorded in the book called *Speculum historiale*, wherefrom had resulted the evil customs and vices that had developed along with excessive greed in the English church more than in any other country.²¹⁸

There is no room here for a detailed comparison of the style of Alpha and that of *Guðmundar saga D* and *Thómas saga II*. One can only agree that Stefán's suggestions are most convincing in view of all the highly distinctive characteristics common to these works, which are in fact so numerous that they demand a separate investigation, if only of their style. There may, however, be discussed very briefly a few more facts in support of Stefán's theory and which concern the general outlook and employment of sources in these works attributed by him to Arngrímr. This entails crediting Arngrímr with a third major work of 'Gregorian' hagiography.

Firstly, as Cederschiöld pointed out,²¹⁹ Alpha's humorous tale of the bell-ringer who went all the way to Rome to be absolved by the pope was apparently known to the author of *Guðmundar saga D* and used by him as the model for his account of how a letter from the pope about Bishop Guðmundr's possible abdication was sought from Norway with amazing speed.²²⁰ This indicates that the author was familiar enough with Alpha's collection to use one of its tales for his own special purposes.

²¹⁸Trans. by S. Karlsson in "Icelandic Lives of Thomas à Becket," pp. 213-214. The verb *taka* (in "taken the basis") was revealed by Stefán's fresh reading of the MS.

²¹⁹"Über eine alte sammlung isländischer æventyri," p. 134.

²²⁰*Biskupa sögur*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1878), ed. G. Vigfússon, pp. 121-126.

Secondly, it is important to note how the author of *Guðmundar saga D*, in a way reminiscent of how Alpha's *exemplum* of William the Conqueror is used in *Thómas saga II*, employs the previously discussed tale of Gregory VI. It is the only Icelandic instance of this tale outside the Marian miracle-collections in Old Norse and the corpus attributed to Alpha. The author employs it when he has described how Archbishop Thomas and Bishop Guðmundr were elected due to secular influence and turns to reflect on how God nevertheless vindicated their immaculate conduct and character with innumerable miracles:

[. . .] thus it is clear as the light of day that he himself confirmed them who is without doubt the supreme bishop and sovereign king of the Law. And it can also be justly said that wherever in the Church a worthy man was elected, without any *simonia*, he was always superior to the Law. *Adrianus primus* verified this when he decreed that a secular man, *Karulo magno*, should have such supreme authority over the clergy that no *Electus* in entire *Italiam* could receive a staff and ring from the seat before an electing chapter tested in the presence of the Lord Emperor how pure he was and aligned with the Law. This decree of *Adriani* was testified by the saintly man *Gregorius sextus* on his deathbed, when he said that never before or later has the Church been so immaculate [*hreinferðug*] in her leaders as in the times of *Karulo magno*, on the grounds that no florin clouded his sight [*at engi florin flaug í hans auga*]. "In our times, however," says the Lord Pope, "when the pomp of kings is driven by greed and vanity, then the Maiden and Mother Holy Church acts most justly if she takes back this *privilegium*, for one and the same thing can in different times be conducted in various ways." Wise men can from these words understand that not only did he honour King *Karulo magno*, but also the entire Church that carries out the election of her leaders in a blameless manner. This is a noble virtue in great kingdoms with good clerics, but nobler still in impoverished lands and with such impoverished people as ourselves, that know only just the crucified *Jesum Christum*.²²¹

²²¹Trans. from *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 2, pp. 42-43.

This employment of the tale of Gregory VI is especially important with regard to the connection between *Guðmundar saga D* and Alpha seeing as it is much more certain that Arngrímr wrote this work than *Thómas saga II*. The affinities between this passage and the ideas and attitudes surrounding Jón's sermon at Staðarhóll as it is described by Alpha in *Jóns þáttr* are also obvious. We encounter the usage of the same tale of Gregory VI so conscientiously connected with that of the just noble by Alpha, the same ideal of the secular ruler who, like the just noble, is not influenced by bribery, and, if our interpretation of the tale of the noble is correct, the same conception of the Church as a female entity that is to be honoured and defended with both the secular and spiritual sword. St Thomas and St Guðmundr are, like Gregory VI, the nobleman and thereby St Þorlákr according to Alpha, ultimately confirmed by "the supreme bishop and sovereign king of the Law", the Judge himself, who is of course superior to the Law and can correct human misjudgement by his momentous miracles.

The passage about Gregory VI's speech concerning Charlemagne in *Guðmundar saga D* is admittedly not found in Alpha's brief version of that tale. But that is precisely why the author of *Guðmundar saga D* needed to use the longer version: so as to be able to make his point about the elections of Thomas and Guðmundr. It appears, as we have shown earlier, that Alpha also knew the longer version in a specific group of Marian miracle-collections and that he acquired the guiding theme of his collection in 624, introducing his much briefer version of the tale, from the exegetical introduction to the longer version in

that group. This passage in *Guðmundar saga D* is in fact clearly based on the longer version in this very group of Marian miracles.²²² The use of the word *hreinferðugr* (immaculate) about a leader of the Church is worthy of note in this respect, for Alpha employs this exact word in 624's words of introduction to the tale of Gregory VI, and it is not used in any other version of the tale. It must be recalled in this context how the author of *Thómas saga II* uses this same group of Marian miracles as well, namely a tale immediately preceding there the longer version of the tale of Gregory VI.

When we link our study of the sermon at Staðarhóll to the affinities between Alpha and *Guðmundar saga D* on the one hand and Alpha and *Thómas saga II* on the other, a subtle pattern emerges within a distinguished corpus of religious literature from around the middle of the fourteenth century. The incorporation of the tale about William the Conqueror into *Thómas saga II* is paralleled in the employment of the tale about Gregory VI in *Guðmundar saga D* (along with the tale of the bell-ringer). Thirdly, there are the strong ties between Alpha's tale of the just noble and *Porláks saga B*. Although we have hitherto not entered upon the subject, this version of *Porláks saga* need not be any older than its only manuscript, which is dated to about 1350.

Now it is not questioned that *Thómas saga II* and *Guðmundar saga D* are the final sagas of St Thomas and St Guðmundr in Old Norse, or that they are from about the same time and intimately connected. But no one has hitherto suggested that *Porláks saga B* represents the last version of the sagas about St Porlákr or that it is as young as the two

²²²See especially the words on p. 460²⁸⁻²⁹ and 461¹⁴⁻¹⁸ in *Marius saga*.

former works and closely related to them and Alpha. *Porláks saga B* has usually been dated to shortly after 1222, although some have wished to date this version to the latter half of the thirteenth century. We will very briefly explain why *Porláks saga B* cannot only very well have been written first around 1350, but also why it should in fact be considered from around that date and not much older.

Although the oldest manuscript of *Porláks saga A* dates to about 1350-1365,²²³ it has hitherto been considered the oldest version, primarily because of its older type of style and the fact that it lacks *Oddaverja þátr*. It has however never been properly explained why *Porláks saga C*, which does have the *þátr*, should be a later version than *Porláks saga B*. Both *B* and *C* contain the *þátr*. *C*, however, notably lacks the two florid prologues found only in *B*,²²⁴ where the author of *B* justifies his interpolation of the *þátr* and rewriting of the saga, pointing to the true foundation of Þorlákr's sanctity and the omission of it by the man who first wrote the saga. It is to be noted as

²²³For the dating of this MS see J. Helgason: "Introduction." *Byskupa sögur* (=Corpus codicum Islandicorum medii aevi, vol. 19, Copenhagen, 1950), pp. 7-22.

²²⁴*Oddaverja þátr* itself is written in a wholly different style closer to the straightforward and popular 'saga-style' characteristic of more secular works like the family sagas and the near-contemporary work called *Sturlunga saga*. The remainder of the saga, originally written around 1200 and most probably in Latin, is in yet another style, the so-called 'learned style', and it is replete with biblical quotations (at least forty) and allusions. *Oddaverja þátr* lacks such markedly ecclesiastical characteristics, there is e.g. not a single biblical quotation to be found in it. In view of internal evidence at the end of *Oddaverja þátr* (Sæmundr Jónsson is mentioned as having been deceased for some time and he died in 1222), one would wish to date it to the latter half of the 13th century. What all this seems to imply is that *Oddaverja þátr* was at first a separate work, or else part of some historical compilation like *Sturlunga*. It is in fact said in the prologue of *Sturlunga* that the compilation contains *Porláks saga* although this is not the case, at least in extant MSS. Since it would be at variance with the editorial principals of this compilation to incorporate a work of pure hagiography, it must be likely that the editor intended to have *Oddaverja þátr* feature in his work. It should be noted in this context that the saga of Bishop Árni Þorláksson, from about 1300, is preserved in one version of *Sturlunga*, and that this historical (not hagiographic) saga appears to be written in the same style as *Oddaverja þátr*.

well that *C* has the *þáttr* slightly further back in the saga than *B*.

This state of affairs led Jón Helgason to conjecture that the writer of *C* came across a copy of *B* while in the midst of copying *A*.²²⁵ This suggestion creates more problems than it is meant to solve. The only manuscript of *B* is very defective. We do not know when the last miracles recorded in *B* took place, since the latter part of the manuscript is lost, and much material preceding this lost part has been torn away. *B* nevertheless contains much material not found in *C*, and it must be taken into account that some of this matter is found *after* the point in *C* where the scribe of the latter work supposedly came across a copy of *B* and began to use it as his source. If it were not for the justifications given in the two prologues of *B* for adding the *þáttr*, it would be much easier to consider *B* to be derived, at least partly, from *C*, since *B*, which is regrettably not preserved in its entirety, appears to have contained everything found in both *C* and *A*, most notably the numerous miracles found in both as well as some found in neither.

Leaving the justification in its two prologues aside, it is thus easiest to assume that *B* is a conflation of *A* and *C*, an assemblage of all sources available to the author with some new additions, as is the case in *Thómas saga II* and *Guðmundar saga D*. Yet another problematic point for those postulating that *Þorláks saga B* is far older than its only manuscript is the fact that this dating is in view of *B*'s two prologues at variance with the research of the past twenty years on the historical development of the florid style in Old Norse

²²⁵"Þorláks saga helga." *KLNM*, vol. 20 (Copenhagen, 1976), col. 390.

literature.²²⁶ In addition to the reasons outlined above, *B* can thus because of the high-florid style of its two prologues most easily be assigned to the same period as its only manuscript, which is the period in which *Thómas saga II* and *Guðmundar saga D* were composed, works where the *entire* material is rewritten in this very same style.

The only real problem that remains concerning the dating of *Porláks saga B* here suggested, apart from the fact that we simply do not know when the lost miracles in the latter half of *B* were said to have taken place, is the author's justification of his interpolation of *Oddaverja þátttr*. From this it is plain that he was the first individual to incorporate the *þátttr* into the saga and that has been taken to mean that *C*, lacking the two prologues but not the *þátttr*, is younger than *B*. Yet it is possible to hold *C* to be older than *B* and still believe that the author of *B* was the first person to interpolate the *þátttr*. *Guðmundar saga D* is preserved with both the only medieval representative of *Porláks saga A* (in Holm. 5 fol., from about 1350-1365) and the oldest representative of *Porláks saga C* (in AM 219 fol. from about 1370-1380). It is therefore quite possible that the author of *Guðmundar saga D*, who is almost certainly Arngrímur Brandsson and also a very likely author of *Thómas saga II*, could have known copies of both *Porláks saga A* and *Porláks saga C*. He might therefore have wished to rewrite the saga of St Porlákr as well, and use for this purpose both *A* and *C* to create *Porláks saga B*, in a way similar to the use of all older sources in *Guðmundar saga D* and *Thómas saga II*. It may be significant in this respect that *Guðmundar saga D* shares information with *Porláks saga B* (about Porlákr's arrival in Iceland

²²⁶For literature on ON style, see R. Astås: "Style. 2. West Norse." *MSE*, pp. 620-621.

after his consecration with the letters from the Archbishop supporting the see's claims on churches in the diocese of Skálholt) and that this is matter is not paralleled elsewhere.²²⁷

Due to the fact that *A* cannot, unlike *C*, be seen to have been copied in medieval times, then it does seem as if *A* was discarded due to the existence of *C* with its *Oddaverja þátr*.²²⁸ Since both seem to be used in *Þorláks saga B* and are preserved in manuscript (the only one of *A*) with *Guðmundar saga D*, and considering that *Guðmundar saga D* has material found only in *Þorláks saga B*, then it is tempting to attribute the writing of *C* to the author of this *Guðmundar saga*, and to solve the only problematic issue (that of the justification in the prologues) by suggesting that this same person ultimately made an even better version, and used both *A* and his own *C* (with *Oddaverja þátr*) for this purpose. The author of *B* may in other words very well have written *C* himself, or have had someone else write it, but decided later to improve this version by placing *Oddaverja þátr* elsewhere in the saga, add some new material, for example from *Guðmundar saga D*, and to justify this new work with two prologues in a fashionable and self-assured style. The author's possible rewriting of his own work here suggested is not dissimilar to what Alpha appears to have done with his collection of *exempla* in 657, where the new and markedly apologetic prologue of 624 introducing a new

²²⁷Compare p. 31 (*Guðmundar saga D*) in *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1878) with (*Þorláks saga B*) pp. 242-243 in *Byskupa sögur*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1978). This passage in *Þorláks saga B* is written in the same florid style as the two prologues of that version.

²²⁸In view of a number of mistakes and misunderstandings impossible to a contemporary, the *A*-version seems in fact to be a corrupt descendent of something like the *C*-version before the *þátr* was inserted into the latter. Moreover, after studying the order of the many miracles appended to the three versions, *B* seems to be reliant on variants of *C* and *A*.

presentation of the material serves as a justification for this material written by the same author at an earlier date

Alpha's *exemplum* of the just noble appears therefore to have a similar relation to *Þorláks saga B* as Stefán Karlsson has shown Alpha's *exemplum* of William the Conqueror to have towards *Thómas saga II*. In both cases we have the compendious Gregorian basis for the understanding of a saint's life set forth in the prefatory words of an *exemplum* attributed to Alpha, and this very basis is then recognized as being taken as the basis of a rewritten life of the saint in question.

The similarities between the words in the tale of the just noble with its introduction and those in *Þorláks saga B* have already been pointed out. The situation is the same in the case of Alpha's tale of William the Conqueror and *Thómas saga II*,²²⁹ and we have mentioned that Alpha's tale of Gregory VI (in 624) seems also to have verbal echo with *Guðmundar saga D*. But although the Gregorian basis of this last rewritten *Guðmundar saga* has no immediate parallel in the tales of Alpha, which is not surprising when it is borne in mind that St Guðmundr, unlike Pope Gregory VI, St Thomas and St Þorlákr, is not a figure discussed in Alpha's *exempla*, the Guðmundr of this saga can, however, be described as being reinterpreted as the counterfeit of the St Thomas in the tale of William the Conqueror and *Thómas saga II*.²³⁰ In other words:

²²⁹Cf. Stefán's "Icelandic Lives of Thomas à Becket," pp. 224-226.

²³⁰See Stefán's discussion of Eiríkur Magnússon's demonstration of how *Thómas saga II* was obviously the chief model for *Guðmundar saga D*. "Icelandic Lives of Thomas à Becket," p. 229-30. Stefán shows that Eiríkur's doubts as to the common authorship of both works are unfounded.

- I. All three *exempla* here discussed belong to the same Icelandic corpus of *ævintýri* attributed to Alpha and perhaps ultimately derived from Bishop Jón Halldórsson.
- II. All three saint's lives are written around 1350.
- III. All six texts, the three *exempla* and three saints' lives, are written in exactly the same type of florid style (in *Porláks saga B* this applies mainly to the two prologues and the matter shared with *Guðmundar saga D*) and promote the very same Gregorian ideas regarding the Church, centred on the saints' uncompromising devotion to God and his Law.

The obvious way to explain this state of affairs is to ascribe all the works to the same author, Alpha, who used or was at least influenced by his own collection of *exempla* when rewriting these three lives, apparently aimed at assembling all relevant sources available and to couch this matter in a highly florid style and to give it all a strong Gregorian interpretation. It follows from all this, since it is most likely that Arngrímr Brandsson, almost certainly the author of *Guðmundar saga D*, was Alpha, that Arngrímr was not only the likely author of *Thómas saga II* but of *Porláks saga B* (and perhaps *C*) as well.

Since *Guðmundar saga D* has for long been considered derivative of *Thómas saga II*, one wonders where *Porláks saga B* should be placed in this sequence of works here attributed to the same person. This will probably never be known due to the sad state of its manuscript. And since the main source of *Guðmundar saga D*, that is to say *Guðmundar saga C* (which Stefán Karlsson wishes to attribute

to Bergr Sökkason), has not yet been edited, then it is difficult to describe fully the working methods of Arngrímr and compare these as they appear in *Guðmundar saga D* with the methods used in *Thómas saga II* and *Porláks saga B*.

It is easy to imagine that Alpha was a monk at Pingeyrar, a monastery famed for literary activities, when one recalls the claim in *Laurentius saga* that Bishop Jón had many friends at the Benedictine monastery of Pingeyrar,²³¹ that 624 may was most likely written in that monastery, and how the Benedictine ladder of humility appears in *Jóns þáttr*. Bergr Sökkason was admittedly a monk at Pingeyrar, but his former teacher there, Bishop Laurentius, made him prior at Munkaþverá in 1322 (the year Jón was consecrated) and abbot there in 1324 or 1325,²³² and so Bergr can hardly be counted among Jón's friends at Pingeyrar. When these northern and Benedictine elements are set beside Alpha's veneration of Jón Halldórsson, a southern Bishop, his admiration for Jón's Order of Friars Preachers and his interest in Jón's priory in Bergen, then Arngrímr Brandsson must seem far more likely to have been Alpha than Bergr, who may never have met Jón Halldórsson or even entered his diocese. This will be understood after a brief survey of Arngrímr's life.²³³

We have already quoted the description in *Laurentius saga* of how Arngrímr, Jón's favourite cleric in Iceland, neglected in the winter of 1328-1329 in Trondheim to carry out his bishop's business relating to Möðruvallahall because of his fascination with the organ. But

²³¹*Laurentius saga*, p. 110¹⁸⁻¹⁹.

²³²*Laurentius saga*, p. 87¹⁸⁻⁸⁸.

²³³For other surveys see G. Jónsson: "Arngrímr ábóti Brandsson og bróðir Eysteinn Ásgrímsson." *Saga 1* (1949-1953), pp. 394-468 and J. Helgason: "Introduction," pp. 7-22.

Arngrímr did not lose Jón's favour with this failure, for he received Oddi from him in 1334, perhaps the best living in entire Iceland.²³⁴ This is the same Oddi that once belonged to Jón Loptsson and the Oddaverjar.

Arngrímr returned with his organ from Norway in 1329,²³⁵ and he must have remained in the service of Jón for some time before he could be rewarded with Oddi. This could possibly be the period in which Arngrímr wrote *Porláks saga C* if our attribution of this work to him is sound. Moreover, Arngrímr could thus easily have attended Jón's sermon at Staðarhóll, that was most likely given in 1327 or 1330.

One annal notes Arngrímr's entrance into a monastery in 1341, two years after Jón's death, although it does not say what house this was.²³⁶ He most likely entered a monastery in the north of Iceland on this occasion, seeing as he is named as a witness to a document at Munkaþverá in 1346.²³⁷ Another document shows that he had become *officialis*, that is to say the bishop's deputy, in the diocese of Hólar during Bishop Ormr Ásláksson's (in office 1343-1355) absence in 1347-1351.²³⁸ Ormr consecrated him as abbot of Þingeyrar on his return to Iceland in 1351.²³⁹ It is noteworthy in this respect that Ormr had St Guðmundr's relics unearthed in 1344. Arngrímr wrote

²³⁴*Íslandske annaler*, V (1334) and VIII (1334).

²³⁵*Ibid.*, IX (1329).

²³⁶*Ibid.*, VIII (1341).

²³⁷*Íslandske Originaldiplomer indtil 1450* (= *Editiones Arnamagnæanæ*, Series A, vol. 7, Copenhagen, 1963), ed. S. Karlsson, no. 21, p. 23 (2. November 1346).

²³⁸*Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 3, no. 19 and *Íslandske Originaldiplomer*, no. 22, pp. 23-24 (10 June 1351).

²³⁹*Ibid.*, VI (1351), VII (1351), VIII (1351). Arngrímr is mentioned as abbot of Þingeyrar also in 1353 (27 April), see *Íslandske Originaldiplomer*, no. 27, pp. 28-29 and in 1354 (17 March), no. 28, p. 30.

his *Guðmundar saga* almost certainly in connection with this official revival of the saint's cult, and this would explain the saga's obvious regard to foreign readers, possible allies in a canonization process. Ormr may quite possibly have rewarded Arngrímr for this work with his advancement within the Church.

Arngrímr's offices demonstrate that he quickly became Ormr's right hand man in the affairs of Hólar, the closest assistant of yet another Norwegian bishop in Iceland. The most important event of Ormr's episcopacy was the introduction in 1354 of Bishop Árni Þorláksson's *Kristinn réttir nýi*, or the new code of canon law that had been introduced into the diocese of Skálholt in 1275 as described earlier. Arngrímr's position as the bishop's deputy would of course have entailed that he enforce the policies and judgements this new code demanded. He must therefore have become deeply involved with the bishop's stormy quarrels with lay leaders in the diocese of Hólar, which concerned the very matters this code was to settle in the episcopacy's favour.²⁴⁰

Bishop Ormr went again, and for the last time, to Norway in 1355 and the annals inform us that priests in the diocese of Hólar revolted against Arngrímr at a meeting in Skagafjörður in 1357. He was at the time accused of "most improper conduct [*borinn hinum liótuzstu maalum*]" and forced to abdicate both as *officialis* and abbot.²⁴¹ It is not specified what conduct of Arngrímr was deemed improper. However, in view of Bishop Ormr's fierce disputes with his clergy and secular subjects, and the fact that Arngrímr was reinstated as the

²⁴⁰On these disputes, see M. Stefánsson: "Frá goðakirkju til biskupskirkju," pp. 250-252.

²⁴¹*Ibid.*, VI (1357), VII (1357), IX (1357).

abbot of Pingeyrar by the Archbishop's *visitatores* the next year,²⁴² it seems likely that the subjects in the diocese of Hólar had judged Arngrímr in some way too diligent in his pursuit of the bishop's policies embodied in the new code of canon law Arngrímr was to enforce.

It is of course tempting to see these events in the diocese of Hólar just after 1354 against the background of the strong Gregorian propaganda featuring in the tales of Alpha, *Guðmundar saga D*, *Thómas saga II* and *Þorláks saga B*. This is especially the case with the vindicative character of the tales of Gregory VI and the just noble in *Jóns þáttr*, which Alpha used as illustration of his guiding theme in 624. This apologetic motivation seems quite appropriate in the writings of an *officialis* accused by his fellow men of improper conduct, an accusation that probably arose from his ostensibly harsh judgements according to the new code of law. Such an official would naturally have wished to write about illustrious predecessors who had also been accused by their fellow men of injustice, but who had ultimately been vindicated as immaculate and just by God, proving "hvat hreinferðug ást vinna má fyrir guði, þótt sjálft verkit sýniz meinum sambundit."

This peculiar but prominent feature in the work of Alpha and the events in the northern diocese shortly after 1354, together with the Benedictine ladder of humility, 624's probable provenance, Jón's, and of course, Arngrímr's connections with Pingeyrar, the politics and style common to *Guðmundar saga D*, *Thómas saga II* and *Þorláks saga B*, the apparently northern commemoration of a southern bishop,

²⁴²Ibid., VII (1358), IX (1358).

the fact that Arngrímr was Bishop Jón's chief protégé and favourite cleric, Alpha's admiration of Jón's order, Jón's preaching and his interest in Jón's priory in Bergen—all of this makes it difficult to imagine anyone but Arngrímr as being Alpha.

The identification is especially compelling when one considers the vow Arngrímr made, when he abdicated, to change his allegiance to the Dominican order and enter Jón's priory in Bergen.²⁴³ Arngrímr did, however, break this vow when he was reinstated as abbot, and he died a Benedictine at Pingeyrar in 1362.²⁴⁴

²⁴³*Ibid.*, VII (1358), IX (1357 and 1358).

²⁴⁴*Ibid.*, VI. *Annal* no. VIII, however, notes his death in 1361.

Chapter five

The Preacher and his art of imagination

To appreciate the integrity of Alpha's piece on Jón Halldórsson, or at least to respond to the impression of it as a "shapeless little record,"²⁴⁵ it may be well to assemble some of the elements already discussed and view them within the general design.

Alpha appears to have been intent on having a certain order in his work. This is seen in the arrangement of the tales in 657 and 624. It is evident as well within *Jóns þátttr* when one observes how the Preacher begins his ascent of humility in Paris, sees himself later climb up the ladder from the choir-loft in Bergen, and finally, how his light soul passes through the roof of the priory there on its way to heaven.

To this implied gradation one should add the sequel of doors encountered within *Jóns þátttr*: that of the schoolroom in Paris, the farmstead of Fróðá, the portal of San Pietro in Bologna, the doorway of the just noble's chamber that harks back to the gates of St Peter's in Rome, and lastly, there is the suggested doorway of the heavenly Temple Jón enters with his death on the day of Mary's purification.

Together, the heavenly scale and these doorways create the subtle imagery of ascending passage that runs chronologically through the *þátttr*, beginning with the youth sitting eager for knowledge in the Parisian schoolroom. In spite of the Benedictine provenance of the ladder, this structure is entirely apt for the inner biography of an itinerant friar, with all the motion that sort of life entailed. It

²⁴⁵P. Foote: "Bischofssaga", p. 43.

exemplifies also the art of memory the Preachers were so fond of—and Alpha may well have learnt the architectural mnemonic from Jón himself. Each part of the piece has a doorway or means of passage in some way striking and therefore memorable leading into another place of moment, evoking thereby a series of mnemonic *loci* storing significant *images* such as the book and the tempest, a marble lion, a severed hand and an deadly viper, a celestial ladder and two eminent figures secular and spiritual, a carving-knife and Christ's body, a gentle maiden with two candles—all of which erects in our imagination a little chapel with many mansions in memory of Jón.

Alpha's conception can however be supplemented by other sources. There are for instance indications in *Laurentius saga* as to the bishop's sense of pride with respect to his high learning. This side to his character seems alluded to in Laurentius' words at the second meeting at Möðruvellir. Jón is said to have addressed the assembly in Latin, but after his intimidating and eloquent speech, the bishop of Hólar reportedly riposted in Norse: "vita menn það herra Jón, at yður er so miukt latinu a[d] tala sem modur tungu yðar en þó skilur það ecki al þyða. og þui tolum so liost. ad aller meigi skilia."²⁴⁶ Jón's opening exclamation in a letter to Laurentius shortly before this may be a demonstrative gust of the Preacher's windy eloquence: "broder Ingimundur af Modru vollum kom so at oss o vorum at vier vissum eigi helldur enn himin mundi bresta."²⁴⁷

In the literature associated with Jón there are two concepts that

²⁴⁶"We know, Lord Jón, that you find it as easy to speak Latin as your mother tongue, but the people do not understand it. Let us therefore speak clearly, that all may understand." Trans. from *Laurentius saga*, p. 116¹²⁻¹⁴.

²⁴⁷"Brother Ingimundr from Möðruvellir came to us so suddenly that we almost thought the heavens would fall." Trans. from *ibid.*, p. 111²⁻⁴.

stand out in this context, namely *stétt* and *list*, that is to say, 'station' and 'art'. Both are employed by Alpha in connection with Jón, but a deeper significance is perhaps seen in the three tales about Perus preserved along with *Clarus saga* and *Jóns þáttur* in 657. Master Perus is in each tale strategically opposed to noblemen, whose asininity, ambition, greed and brute force is ridiculed by the Arabian expert of illusion visiting their courts. This juxtaposition of the Master and noblefolk features as well in *Clarus saga*, for his *list* plays no small part in the harsh and ludicrous humiliations suffered by both Prince Clarus and Princess Serena, people of the highest *stétt*, initiating outrageous adventures that play parodically on courtly proprieties and on the conventions of courtly love.

In one tale, it is related that Perus acted as councillor in the court of two brothers. He asked for their sister's hand, but "they did not wish to give her to him in marriage because he was without title and money, *although he was the most learned of men* [*en allra manna var hann bezt mentr*]; these brothers were not said to have been very wise."²⁴⁸ Despite this denial Perus made love to their sister on a nightly basis, leaving his simulacrum to drink meanwhile in the company of the torpid noblemen.

In another tale, Perus encounters a noble by the name of *Prinz*. He forces Perus, who travels alone, to trade his beautiful horse with his, stating arrogantly that it is *eigi útígins mannz eign*.²⁴⁹ But when the foppish Prinz and his entourage have travelled for a while, one of the men looks into a stone with the property of dispelling illusions, and

²⁴⁸Trans. from *Islendzk æventyri*, vol. 1, p. 218⁵⁻⁸.

²⁴⁹"a possession not suited for ignobles." Trans. from *ibid.* 224¹⁵⁻¹⁶.

they thus discover that Prinz is pompously riding through the countryside on what is actually a load of faggots. Perus is promptly apprehended and bound and taken to a pier where he is to be executed publicly for his deceptive magic. But after chastizing Prinz for his blinding covetousness, Perus suddenly breaks free and draws out of his pocket a piece of chalk. He thereupon draws a picture of a ship set for sail, and after a mighty din the people see him sail away into the blue.

The finale to the tale about Perus and the noble brothers is not dissimilar. His affair with their sister is ultimately revealed and Perus is therefore bound and taken to a wood where he is to be executed in front of a large gathering. But the Master suddenly comes loose, and the people "thought they saw him take a blue thread out of his belt-pocket, toss it up into the air, and that it turned into a rope. They saw him grab hold of one end and climb up, and he then vanished, never to be seen again."²⁵⁰

The artistic escapes of the proud and licentious Perus provide a vivid contrast to the ladder of humility and the maudlin maiden ascending towards her conjugal bed in *Jóns þáttur*. If these tales and *Clarus saga* did in fact feature in Jón's "worldly and outspoken" repertoire, then Master Perus' exploits may be taken as a significant extension to what we have already gathered about the bishop's not so modest perception of himself as a man of outlandish and lofty learning. The dazzling demonstrations of Perus' *list* and how this constitutes the real measure of *stétt* unmistakably harbour an ideal of the learned man's supremacy, and they strike us as clandestine but

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 233⁸⁹⁻⁹³.

nevertheless compelling *exempla* of his indelible superiority to other classes of men remarkably close to the image of the Renaissance Magus encountered two centuries later. This figure may well have come closer to Jón's own spiritual ideal, at least in the intimacy of his own imagination and entertainment, than the hagiographic mannequin depicted in the last chapter of 657. The two are not easily reconciled in one person, but if we are to take the gentle maiden as illustrative of Jón's soul, then we can perhaps identify Perus as the Preacher's private demon.

The learned parodies and scurrilous humour surrounding Master Perus in *Clarus saga* and the three tales dealing with him in 657, make these stories seem quite at home in the goliardic literature on the continent, the irreverent Latin poetry of the wandering scholars and schoolboys from which Jón's romance might very well have been taken. Such works are understandably filled with pseudonyms,²⁵¹ and one wonders whether the mention of Jón *Freygerðarson*, this "worldly and outspoken" scholar, is not simply a sort of *nom de plume* or nick-name in the goliardic tradition, playing on the apparent resemblance between Jón's story and the Norse myth about the union of Freyr and Gerðr which Snorri Sturluson saw as a sort of primeval romance.

The consecrated son of Freygerðr, Johannes Nordmannus and Johannes Anglicus, the *persona* of St Þorlákr and the rather mismatched figures of Master Perus and the gentle maiden—all bear witness to Jón's remarkable enrichment of the Icelandic imagination. But it is only by virtue of the surviving literature that we are enabled

²⁵¹Cf. A. G. Rigg: "Goliard and Other Pseudonyms." *Studi medievali* 18 (1977), pp. 65-109.

to appreciate his legacy more thoroughly than of others in fourteenth-century Iceland, and in a way, this memory of Jón confirms his own maxim at the close of the tempestuous tale from Paris, that is to say, *hverjar listir lifa í bókunum þótt heimrinn gjöriz gamall*.

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